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# **DERFEL THE STRONG**





# DERFEL THE STRONG

A ROMANCE OF THE DAYS OF  
KING HENRY VIII.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"THE TURN OF THE TIDE," "THE TEMPEST OF THE HEART,"  
ETC.

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# DERFEL THE STRONG

## PROLOGUE

ONE fair October day, in the nineteenth year of the reign of King Henry VIII., a wayfarer might have been seen picking his steps in and out of the tangled briars and crimson-leaved, blackberried brambles that fringed the River Dee and formed the undergrowth of the dense forest that stretched away to the eastward. Towards the west Moel-Sych, stateliest of the Berwyns, raised his head above the soaring peaks, that seemed to touch the sky, as they stretched upward into the infinite spaces of blue ether.

The way was toilsome, for there was no road, and the traveller followed the course of the stream, being careful to keep the Berwyn Mountains a little to his left as he made his way forward. Now and again a rabbit crossed his path, or a hare. Once he had seen the antlered head of a stag looking at him with fearful eyes athwart the greenery ; but he raised no bow, and suffered the



creature to go unharmed, notwithstanding that he was fasting since the night before, when he had eaten the last of the provisions with which a hospitable farmer's wife had filled his scrip.

Noon found him, perplexed and a trifle anxious, gathering the great clusters of blackberries that waved at him temptingly from every trembling branch that his progress had disturbed. The sun had already passed the zenith when he seated himself at the side of the stream, his broad-brimmed hat filled with the fruit. He had chosen a little sandy beach, in which were embedded large grey boulders in such a manner as to form a natural ford of stepping-stones. When he had eaten he knelt, putting his lips to the clear water, and drank long and deeply. Somewhat refreshed, he picked up his trusty staff and resumed his journey.

The sun was beginning to decline when he espied a streak of blue smoke issuing from the depths of the forest and rising steadily into the opalescent sky. Apparently the fire from which it rose was not far from the banks of the stream, and he pushed forward with renewed energy; for though the day was fair, the nights were growing chilly and frosty, and he was scarcely desirous of passing the hours of darkness in the forest. It was not long before he came to an opening in the trees—a little glade surrounded by towering beeches. The ground was covered with a thick

mossy greensward of a deep rich colour, and sloped down gently to the water's edge. At the farther side of the glade stood a hut built of logs and covered with turf, with a pointed hole in the roof through which was rising the column of smoke that had first attracted his notice. But the object that more than any claimed his attention was the figure of an old crone who sat by the stream fishing with a long line. She appeared to be long past middle life, though he could not see her face under the high pointed hat ; but her back was bent, and her movements difficult. She had not heard his approach, for his footfalls were inaudible on the springy turf, but she turned her head as he drew near and gave her "Good-morrow."

"Eh?" she said in a high-pitched, cracked voice. It was clear that she knew no English, and the pilgrim spoke a few words in Cymric. She turned to him more graciously then, and her eyes seemed to pierce him.

"I seek the shrine of St. Derfel," he said, and waited.

"Then you'll no reach it to-night, my man!" she answered him. "'Tis a long day's travel from this. You must skirt the mountains until you come to the hut of a charcoal-burner, and from thence a day's journey to the west will bring you to the shrine. What do you at Llanderfel?" she asked suspiciously.

"I am on pilgrimage, good mother," he said, and crossed himself uneasily, for the old woman's black, beady eyes were burning right into his soul.

"Nay," she said, divining his thought, "I am no witch, Master Pilgrim. All the world hereabout know old Megan, the widow of David the charcoal-burner."

"I pray you, good mother, give me of your cheer and the wherewith to make a bed for the night; for I have not eaten to-day, save for some berries washed down by a draught from the stream."

The old woman gave utterance to a kind of grunt, and rose with difficulty from the bank where she had been seated. Her lines gave her some little trouble, but the pilgrim went to her assistance without speaking further, and secured them to a branch that overhung the river. She watched him suspiciously, and not until she saw that they were made fast did she turn with feeble steps to the hut.

Her age was now apparent. Her old face was seamed and wrinkled with more than the three score and ten years allotted to the children of men, her back was bent nearly double, and she leaned heavily upon a stout oaken staff. But in the midst of the old face, overhung by wisps of wiry white hair, the piercing black eyes gleamed like coals of fire; and the fashion of her speech



was quick and youthful, albeit the voice was cracked and quavering.

The pilgrim stood before the door, and waited until his hostess came forth. This time she brought him a loaf and a mess of pottage in a wooden bowl. He took the gift thankfully, and sat on a fallen tree to eat his supper, the old crone watching him keenly the while.

"What takes you to Llanderfel?" she asked him again, when he had finished and handed her back the bowl.

"I told you, good mother, I go on pilgrimage."

She laughed, and her laugh was a long-drawn cackle of mockery.

"Yet you have not the pilgrim's heart," she said. "My old eyes can see farther than your young ones, Sir Pilgrim. It were better for you if you went not to Llanderfel."

"How now?" he asked quickly. "I go for my vow's sake, and to seek the aid of the good saint."

"Go not to Llanderfel," she repeated solemnly; and her eyes burned him. He looked down uneasily.

"Nay, mother, I must e'en fulfil my vow."

She leaned heavily upon her staff, and her head, with its high-crowned hat, nodded weirdly once or twice; then, with one finger raised and pointed in warning, she broke into a sort of wild chant:

"Go not to Llanderfel, Robert Lyst!" He

started, for he had not told his name to any person since he had left Oxford two months before. "Go not—go not ! It is written that ill-fortune and ill-doing shall follow after. I can see the shrine empty and the image thrown down ; but the hand that strikes the saint is accursed, for he shall reap what he sows, and the forest shall burn—shall burn—for the image of St. Derfel shall set it on fire !"

The pilgrim listened impatiently, for he could see neither rhyme nor reason in the old woman's words, and the glance of her black eyes and the menace of her uplifted finger filled him with uneasiness.

"Do you go ?" she asked, seeing that he did not answer her.

"I go," he said shortly.

The old woman drew nearer.

"Then your hand shall reap the curse that your hand shall sow !" she said sternly. "I may not refuse to direct you. Take the high path that leads across the side of the hill ; but beware, for if your foot slip in the darkness nothing can save you. And now begone, rash man, since you will not be warned !"

He strove to utter some words of thanks, but she would not hear him.

"The word is true that I have spoken," she said, "but woe to the man by whose hand it is fulfilled !"

He trembled under the glance of her eyes, but made no answer, and turned from her to the upland path that she had shown him.

The rest and refreshment had restored his strength, and he started out with a strong, swinging step on the road that led over the bleak bare hills to the shrine of St. Derfel the Strong.

A track had been trodden out through the brushwood, and it was comparatively easy walking, for in a little while he found himself upon the slope of the hill, the forest became less dense, and then quite suddenly he emerged upon the bare mountain-side.

The road was a mere uneven ledge across the rocky slope. It was still twilight up there, though the darkness had already fallen under the leafy canopy of green in the valley below. The rough track became difficult in places, after a time taxing even the strong limbs and well-knit frame of Robert Lyst. Once he bared his head to the evening breeze, and stood looking across the valley to Moel-Sych, which shone whitely just then in the mystic light of the rising moon.

The youth was good to look upon in the soft light. A boyish face, with eyes deep and dark as the pools in a mountain torrent, and delicate features under a smooth white brow, seemed in strange contrast to the athletic figure; and yet it might be that the pointed chin and weak, uncertain mouth were in as sharp contrast to the rest of his

features, even if the deep dark eyes denied their potential cruelty.

He stood for a while leaning on his staff, with the breeze blowing through his dark curls and stinging his cheek. A shudder ran through his frame, and he crossed himself devoutly, as he remembered the stories of the great King and his knightly circle, who held the forest at his feet against all comers. There were those in the mountains who averred that they had seen the dead King riding abroad with his train of ghostly knights, and the pilgrim uttered a fervent prayer for protection against evil spirits and phantoms of the night ere he set forward again after his brief rest.

The wind fell after a time, and a mist began to rise that blotted out the forest and hushed the distant murmur of the river below ; then, almost as soon as it reached the mountain road, it thickened until it became impossible for the wayfarer to see a hand's breadth before him. For a little while longer he crept forward cautiously, feeling with one hand the side of the hill while he essayed the path before him with his staff, after the fashion of a blind man. The sudden failure of the path disconcerted him, and he groped for a boulder, that he might seat himself to wait until the mist should clear. Now and again a beam of moonlight shone dimly through the mist, but always to mock him with false hopes. He became

weary at last, and stretched himself to sleep as best he might, keeping as far from the edge of the slope as possible, and trying to get between the boulder and the wall of rock that towered above him. Once he heard an owl hoot quite near him, and he realized that the mist reached but little farther up the slope than the road by which he had come, and that the great silent crags overhead lay white in the moonlight.

With a muttered *Ave* he fell asleep, waking only when the rosy flush of dawn rested on the hill-tops. Opening his eyes and stretching his cramped limbs, he knelt for his morning prayer, then he looked anxiously around him. The path had come to an end! He looked with a shudder at the precipice that frowned beneath him, and retraced his steps. An hour's walking brought him back to the hut in the green glade, but the old woman had vanished, the door of her solitary dwelling stood open, and the very embers of her fire were dead.

He threw himself down on the soft moss. His night on the mountain had left him chill and stiff, and for a moment he found himself at a dead-lock.

The snapping of a twig made him look up quickly, and he rose hastily, for a Franciscan friar had emerged from the forest that he had traversed the day before.

"God save you!" said the Friar mildly.

"God save your Reverence!" replied the youth. "I would fain find my way out of this wood," he added. "I spent last night on the mountain, and the good dame, who was here when I started, is here no longer."

The Friar had advanced to the hut, and seemed to be examining the remains of the fire that lay in its midst.

"Ay, she hath gone," he said slowly, more to himself than to the boy. The latter turned to him.

"I was on pilgrimage," he said shortly, "to the shrine of St. Derfel." The Friar nodded.

"The road lies by the mountain," replied the latter, and pointed upward to the path that disappeared amongst the trees.

"Nay, that is a false road, reverend Father," protested the youth; "it leads to a blind end on the brink of a precipice. I rested there last night, and returned hither this morning."

"You missed the upper path, my son," said the Friar gently. "If you will come with me I will conduct you, for I also go on pilgrimage to Llan-derfel."

The pilgrim hastily assented, and the two men set forth together. They passed safely over the mountain path and onward, keeping Moel-Sych on their left, till the mist, rising again, blotted the valley from their sight.

"I faint, Father," said the youth. "Since last night I have not eaten, and the day is declining."

"Poor lad!" ejaculated the Friar. "Come, lean on me—my arm is strong—and in a little while we shall reach the shrine."

But the mists descended more thickly than ever, and with a rueful face the Friar was constrained to admit that he had lost the road. Nevertheless, he continued to urge his companion on, guiding and supporting his worn-out frame as best he might. The night had already fallen, when a sudden turn in the path brought them to the hut of a charcoal-burner, and there they ate and rested till the day.

The morning brought no change—the mist still lay thickly over the road. With hearty thanks to their host for his hospitality, they resumed their journey. It seemed to the Friar that they were going from Llanderfel instead of toward the shrine, for the road was becoming less mountainous, and from time to time they passed small homesteads, at one of which they spent the night with the comforts of a bed of hay and a good supper.

The following morning was clear and bright, but bitterly cold with the first hard, nipping frost of early winter. Robert Lyst rose softly, and went out while the Friar still knelt at his orisons. For a moment he stood looking perplexedly at the mountains, which lay blue and distant behind them; then he called to his companion.

"What witchcraft is this?" he said, crossing himself hastily. "Those mountains, that we



traversed but yesterday, are shrunk away from us in the night, or do I dream it?"

The Priest rubbed his eyes.

"It passeth understanding," he said gravely, "for our feet are on the road that leadeth to London, and in one day we have covered three days' travel."

Robert Lyst spoke not, but looked amazed at the distant peaks, and at the road they had travelled, and at the Friar, who stood beside him. A great fear fell upon him, and he knelt.

"Who are you, Friar?" he asked.

The Priest turned to him from the contemplation of the mystery.

"An unworthy disciple of St. Francis, my son, from the Monastery of the Observants at Greenwich, and I am bound to return thither. It may be that your destiny is there also?"

"Nay, that may scarcely be, reverend Father; for I have not thought to be a friar, though I have sometimes felt aspirations towards the Church."

The Priest did not answer him, but walked forward slowly and resolutely, with his face set toward London.

For a moment Robert Lyst lingered. The events of the past few hours had broken down his landmarks, but he still hesitated; then, dominated by some half-realized impulse, he followed the Friar, unwillingly at first, but with greater desire as he drew nearer.

"I pray you, reverend Father, tell me your name," he said, as he came up with him.

"Brother Peto. And yours?" he inquired kindly.

"Robert Lyst, of Chester," responded the pilgrim.

"Now may God bless you, Robert Lyst! Is your father still living?"

"My parents are dead; they died when I was young, so please you, reverend Father."

"And since then?"

"I grew to man's estate under the shadow of the Church, reverend Father, having been a chorister of Chester Cathedral in my boyhood, and of late a poor student of Oxford."

"It is well, Robert Lyst," spoke the Friar heartily. "I bid you welcome to our home at Greenwich. Later, an you desire it, you may prevail on our Provincial to admit you to our company; an you wish it not, you will nevertheless be welcome to such hospitality as our house affords, seeing that we have been way-comrades in this adventure."

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## CHAPTER I

### THE KING'S LADY

THE Friar walked slowly back and forth in the shadow of the elms. The winter afternoon was drawing to a close, and the red glow of a frosty sunset rested on the grey stones of Greenwich Palace, while from the east black and heavy clouds rose slowly and menacingly into the zenith. From time to time the Priest glanced up cautiously from the book that he held in his hands, and scanned the river anxiously, as though he expected someone to arrive by that highway. The darkness had nearly fallen before the dip of oars caught his ear, and slowly he strolled in the direction of the sound, glancing neither to right nor left, but with bent head, and his hands lightly clasped about the book that he could no longer see to read. A swift glance assured him that the man who stepped briskly ashore from the little wherry was the person whom he expected, and, without making any sign of recognition, he walked slowly into the shadow of a tall hedge and waited.

The new-comer turned to the oarsman.

"Keep off in the stream, Hubert; I will call when I want you again."

The man looked up at him understandingly, and gave vent to a sort of guttural grunt that his master apparently understood well, for without further parley he turned and walked rapidly in the direction taken by the Friar. The latter had turned, and stood waiting for him close under the yew hedge that bordered the private garden of the palace.

"God save you, Sir James!" was the old man's softly uttered salutation.

"God save you, reverend Father!" responded the new-comer. "You expected me?"

"Ay, my son. Word was brought me this noon that you wished to see me to-night, and I have waited for you. The park is the safest place for our conference, but speak softly and tread warily—there be spies abroad."

"Spies—spies! I be sick of the word, Father. A man may not be a good Catholic in these days, and yet he dare not be a heretic either. Tell me, what means this royal tyrant?"

"Peace, my son!—those are dangerous words. And since both God and man forbid heresy, keep clear of it. As for being a good Catholic, it is man only who forbids that. Your duty is clear, albeit not easy. These be terrible times in which

we live ; it behoves us to act warily, and prayerfully, and humbly."

"Look you, Father," exclaimed the youth passionately, "'twere easier, methinks, to *seem* to bend before the power that would assuredly break you otherwise!"

"Nay ; the seeming would be treason, Sir James. Let us—an' the conflict be forced on us—stand firm in the Faith."

The young man sighed ; there were so many reasons why passing events pressed heavily upon him. For one thing, he had great possessions that brought him into prominence, and sooner or later he felt that he would surely be put to the test. Then he was fain to wed a lady in attendance on the persecuted Queen. To make matters worse, her father had strayed from the truth, and was even then plotting for the success of the new religion begotten in Germany. He foresaw all kinds of difficulties, and turned almost impatiently from the Friar, for he had sought the interview in the hope that Father Forrest would see the matter as he did, and counsel him according to the desire of his heart.

It was only a stone's-throw to the royal palace, where King Henry and his Court were assembled for the keeping of the Christmas Festival. Had it not been for policy's sake, and for dread of the Emperor's vengeance, Henry would have already cast aside the wife of his youth. But the fear of

Charles, and the old habit of reverence for the Pope, which he had not as yet entirely lost, restrained him for the time. He chafed at the delay, and surely, if slowly, the circle narrowed about the unfortunate Queen and her faithful friends.

A light footfall on the grass escaped their notice, until the rustle of a lady's skirt fell upon their ears. Forrest put out his hand quickly, and drew the boy closer into the shadow.

"'Tis Mistress Anne Boleyn," he whispered. The Friar laid his finger on the young man's lips in warning, but even he could scarce refrain from an exclamation, as a burly figure issued from a postern door, that gave access to the kitchens of the palace, and passed quickly across the lawn to where the lady stood silently waiting. She swept a demure little courtesy and stepped forward to greet the King.

"I am here, my Liege, I have been waiting," she said. Despite the displeasure of her tone he laughed easily.

"I fear I have kept you over long, sweetheart," he cried, taking both her hands in his. "There was a missive from the Emperor, and Katherine must needs see it. Time flies fast when a fair lady is waiting, and I have chafed at the delay."

Anne stood looking at the point of her shoe upon which the gleam of a jewel shone in the light of the rising moon.

"My Liege," she said steadily, "I craved this interview that I might say farewell." The King started, but he did not speak, and the low, sweet voice went on : "I can no longer play the Queen false. Her soft reproaches fill me with uneasiness. She sees, she knows—and blames me not." The voice faltered ; there were tears on the lady's cheeks.

"Blames you not ! Nay, then, my Lady Anne, wherefore would you say farewell ? By Our Lady, you shall not go ! Has any dared——?"

"No, no, my dear Liege," broke in Anne quickly, "none has dared. But I fear me that Heaven looks askance upon our love, since it must needs pain so sweet a soul as the Queen's."

Henry made an impatient gesture.

"I pray you, Anne, to leave all such thoughts to those better able than ourselves to decide."

"My Lord Cardinal, for instance !" cried Anne scornfully. "The worst enemy that I have, Henry, and no friend to the Queen either !"

The King looked annoyed.

"You are unjust, Anne," he said. "The Cardinal is between two fires. He is slow, but in time he will bow to our wishes, fear it not."

Anne shuddered.

"And if not ?"

"Then you shall be mine still in spite of them, Anne."

She drew herself away from him quickly.



"The Queen thinks no such evil of me, Henry. To-day we played at cards, and she said to me : ' My Lady Anne, you have the good hap ever to stop at a King ; but you are like others—you will have all or none.' 'Twere ill to betray a trust like that, to wound so generous a heart."

"Bethink you, Anne, there is the succession at stake. Sweetheart, you will think better of this. I will wait no longer—the Queen's affair shall be put in hand at once. Yours be the task to see that no letters pass between her and the Emperor."

"Nay, then, Henry, choose some other for that task ; I will not stoop to play the spy. Ask Mistress Ward ; she is over timid, and will do that for fear to which rewards would never tempt her. She is betrothed to one Sir James Blundell, a worthy knight with a fair estate.

Henry laughed good-humouredly.

"Well spoken, my Lady Anne—and queen-like, forsooth ! You will grace a throne, my beauty, as you have adorned a court. Now, no more of this talk of leave-taking. We understand each other, do we not ? See, here is a jewel for your white throat ; let me see it there to-night."

Anne felt herself dismissed, and with another stately courtesy turned to go.

"I thank you, my dear Liege," she murmured, as Henry seized her white hand and carried it gallantly to his lips.

He stood for a few moments looking after her.

"She shall be mine, Cardinal or no Cardinal!" he exclaimed, and turned as if to walk in the park, to the great discomfiture of Sir James Blundell and his companion; but he changed his mind apparently, for, after glancing keenly at the deserted wharf, he walked back quickly to the great entrance of the palace. The sharp word of command, and the clang of metal as the weapons of the guard were brought to the salute, assured the Friar that he and the knight might safely emerge from their hiding-place.

"Forewarned is forearmed, Father," said the young man.

"Ay," assented the Friar dreamily. "But you will be faithful, Sir James—whatever betide, you will not fail?" he asked anxiously.

"God helping me, I will not, Father!" he answered fervently, and the Priest was content.

"I will warn the Lady Alison," he said. "You must entrust me with your message, Sir James."

"Nay, that may I not, by your leave, Father, for I have promised the Ambassador to deliver the letter into no hands save those of the Queen herself. There be so many spies about the unhappy lady that none can be trusted. I pray you send the Lady Alison to me; she will contrive to get me an audience of the Queen."

"And the King at hand? You are more wanting in prudence than in integrity, Sir James."

"The time grows short, Father; hasten! Lady

Alison is shrewd, and will contrive a means. Bethink you of the poor Queen's need."

"I do—I do, Sir James; but you will scarce serve her by running your own head into danger. And remember that you are now a marked man, thanks to the Lady Anne's report of you."

The youth started.

"I had not thought of that. Tell me what to do. As yet neither the King nor Anne can have any suspicion of us; they have scarce had time to think of the matter."

The Priest thought for a moment.

"The letter is in cipher?" he asked.

"Yes, Father; but even cipher avails not with men like these to circumvent."

"Do you know the cipher, my son?"

Sir James assented, wondering a little at the question.

"Then come with me, and I will explain how you may give the letter to the Queen without seeing her."

The two men passed hastily and quietly through the park until they reached the Monastery of the Observant Friars. Father Forrest led his guest into a small room that opened out of a stone cloister.

"We shall be safe here," he said in an undertone. "Now for my plan. You will write a letter to the Lady Alison, as it were from yourself, and in it you will insert the cipher message. Do you follow me?"

Sir James inclined his head.

"But——" he said.

"Patience, Sir James ! The letter will not be for the Queen, but for Lady Alison Ward—a letter from her lover—*with the Queen's message in cipher enclosed in it*—not in a separate note, mind, but part and parcel of the letter itself. The thing must pass unchallenged ; it may be read, but none will dream that it is other than it seems."

"But the Queen, Father—how will she know?"

"I will tell her. She will send for me to-night to make her confession ; I will tell her then. And I will not warn the Lady Alison ; she will know nothing of the business."

Sir James seized the Priest's hand.

"I cannot thank you, Father," he said earnestly. "Give me pens and paper, and let me write the letter now."

For an hour he sat writing, slowly and laboriously, setting the Queen's message into such a missive as a lady might receive from her lover, and anxious lest the cipher might make it appear otherwise than it should in such a case. Father Forrest sat watching him, his thoughts busy with the interview to which he and the knight had been unwilling witnesses that evening. Now and again his lips moved in prayer as he looked with prophetic eye athwart the mists of the future and dimly foresaw the end of it all.

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## CHAPTER II

### THE FRIAR'S DREAM

THE Christmas Compline was over in the Church of the Observant Friars. The faint perfume of incense still hung about the stately church, and there was a slight disorder consequent on the departure of the congregation. It was already dark when the figure of a friar passed in through a side-door and slipped into a stall. His form was bent, less with his years than with the burden that they had brought him in his old age. Forrest—for it was he—knelt on the altar-step before passing silently to his stall in the deepest shadow of the sanctuary. His heart was heavy with apprehension. Through the length and breadth of the land a whisper had passed—only a whisper; sometimes it was not even that—the uplift of an eyebrow, the compression of disapproving lips, the quick glance of apprehension when the question was mooted. Few dared discuss the matter, walls had developed ears surprisingly of late, and chance words were apt to draw suspicion on their

utterers. The position of the Lady Anne Boleyn at the Court was the scandal of the country, and the devout and patient Katharine its centre of sympathy. But sympathy can accomplish but little against the heartlessness of an all but absolute monarch, who was a consummate diplomatist to boot. And for the rest, the affair was as yet but shadowy—a mere repetition of royal escapades that had become only too familiar. Slowly and insidiously had the scandal worked its way; the word “divorce” had scarcely yet been breathed openly, but the people *knew*, with that curious instinct that gives life and yields absolute credence to a half-told tale.

Churchmen were anxious and alarmed. When upstarts like Thomas Cromwell had the royal ear, it was hard to foresee the outcome. All these things passed through the Friar’s mind, hindering his devotions, until he rose and flung himself on his knees before the great crucifix. He knelt there long, a silent figure in the winter gloom. Through the painted windows a wan light poured into the church in strangely fantastic colourings, for the moon had arisen. Yet still he knelt there alone, for his brethren were sleeping—alone with his burden of years and toils; alone, knowing himself to be a marked man, the Queen’s confessor, and a witness of her marriage in that very church. The bitterness of death entered into his soul as he knelt there, and in the agony of appre-

hension that engulfed him he threw himself forward and passed his arms about the cross.

"Jesu, pity me!" he cried aloud, and his face encountered the touch of the transfixed feet. There was comfort in the contact, and he rested his damp forehead against them, sobbing out his tale of fear and anguish at the feet of the Master who knew. For hours he knelt thus, fighting with the dread that threatened to overwhelm him, throwing aside the suggestions of the tempter, who urged upon him the necessity of prudence, of flight, or even of seeming submission to the royal demands.

Midnight brought the friars to their matins. Father Forrest arose like one in a dream, and passed once more to his stall. The early moon had set, and the little candles carried by the brethren only served to accentuate the gloom. Grotesque shadows bobbed and fluttered on the pillars behind them—figures of gigantic friars with pointed cowls. Forrest looked up for a moment, and his eyes encountered a strange dark cross that appeared to overshadow the whole community. From wall to wall it reached, and, starting from the altar, lost itself in the dark mystery of the nave beyond. He shuddered a little, and his eyes sought his book again, but the well-known words slipped unheeded from his lips, for his soul was still struggling with the powers of darkness. When the office came to an



end, he followed the long, silent procession of friars to the monastery, to rest in his cell till dawn.

His watch had tired him, but he could not sleep, and lay tossing on his narrow bed waiting for the morning ; and still the phantom of fear crouched by him, and still he held it at bay, until the bell called him once more to his place in the choir. The day dawned bright and cold. When the sun rose it rested in crimson magnificence on the grey stones of the church, like a presage of martyrdom, or the glory of autumn that foretells the frosts of winter. Father Forrest heeded it not, for it was the hour for him to go to the palace in his official capacity of Chaplain to the Queen. She was awaiting him in her private oratory, and he went to the altar as soon as he was vested. Years afterward some of those present remembered that Mass of St. Stephen. The Queen knelt, motionless and absorbed, in the midst of her ladies ; the King glanced restlessly about with keen eyes, observing everything that passed. The Friar, who stood at the altar, was removed from them as Moses of old was hidden upon the Holy Mount. Alison started once when he turned, for she almost fancied that a glory hovered round his venerable head and gave him a look of awful majesty ; but she put the fancy from her, praying the more earnestly. The *Sanctus* seemed to her to have a depth of meaning that it had never had

for her before, and when the awful stillness of the Consecration hushed the hearts of all she imagined that she stood on Calvary at the supreme moment of the world's redemption. For the few fleeting moments that remained she forgot all besides, and prayed as she had seldom prayed. The Friar proceeded with the Mass; the time came when he held the white Host in his trembling hands, and his shrinking words tore the disguises from all hearts.

*"Domine, non sum dignus!"* he cried. It was the old prayer, the ancient confession; tens of thousands, nay, millions upon millions of men had uttered it day by day through the long centuries, until it seemed that it must have become trite. The Friar's voice lent new meaning to the old words. Alison looked up; she was almost certain of the glory now, and she held her breath in awe. In the intense stillness a sudden sound made her turn her head. The King had left the oratory.

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An usher came to Father Forrest as he was unvesting. For a moment he hesitated—the Friar's face overawed him; but the King was waiting, and his errand admitted of no delay.

"His Grace would have speech with you at once, reverend Father," he said.

The Priest looked at him for a moment, scarcely comprehending the message; then memory returned to him, and with it the conflict of the past

night. But his Mass had tranquillized him, and, although he had lost none of his apprehensive shrinking, he went forward boldly.

The King was seated writing at a table. Before him lay disordered papers, as though he had been searching for something amongst them. Father Forrest entered quietly, and stood waiting, his hands hidden in the sleeves of his habit. For a moment Henry appeared unconscious of his presence; then he looked up, and affected to start a little.

"'Tis well, Father Forrest," he said with a smile, and extended his hand graciously. The Priest bent the knee, and raised it to his lips.

"You sent for me, my Liege?" he said.

"Ay, Father," he replied, "touching our secret matter." Forrest waited; he had paled to the lips, and the King watched him. "Come, Father Forrest, you should be able to help us in this affair—for the easing of our conscience," he added slowly. Then, as the Priest remained silent: "You know better how to advise the Queen than any other—for her own good, I mean." Forrest looked up, and his eyes blazed like flames.

"I may not seek to turn the Queen from her purpose," he said. "She is your Grace's true wife; you made her so. She has been faithful, she is the mother of your child, your anointed Queen. Bethink you, my Liege, if any man sought to do the like, would you not be the first to cry shame?"

Henry was startled at the expression in the Priest's eyes, and as Forrest proceeded he shrank from him ; but the luminous eyes held his, and he could not turn them from the venerable figure before him.

"Peace!" he interjected ; but the flood of the Friar's pleading could not be stayed, and he continued as though he had not heard the King's word :

"The honour of England—of Christendom—is at stake. If you put away your Queen that you may take another to wife, in what are you better than the Saracens against whom your royal ancestors gloried to fight? And if you put her away, where will you find a more Christian Princess, a more honourable alliance—a better wife? Hath she not striven for your Grace's pleasure in all things—proved herself worthy the royal dignity you conferred upon her—upheld the honour of your race and Crown? Oh, be-think, your Grace, how you do this incomparable lady such injustice! All Christendom looks on—and waits. Before God, you cannot do this wrong!"

In his exceeding earnestness the old man fell on his knees and extended his hands to the King, who retreated before him, but without taking his fascinated eyes from the Friar's face.

There was a moment's silence, then the King spoke :

"Rise, Father," he said; "your words are but echoes to my own desires. Would that I might give ear to so sweet a counsel; for, truly, the Lady Katharine hath ever been to me all that you claim for her—and more. Never was more virtuous a woman, or more complaisant a wife, or more noble a Queen. But—my conscience is troubled—she was my brother's wife—I cannot see my way. Advise me, Father—it was to that end I sent for you."

Henry seated himself at the table, shading his brows with one hand, as though he could not endure the flame of the Friar's eyes; with the other he selected a paper and pen from the pile before him.

The Priest stood silent, his hands still hidden in his sleeves, waiting for the King's lead. Henry looked up uneasily at last.

"Tell me, Father Forrest," he said slowly, "may a man marry his dead brother's wife?"

"Nay, I am no great theologian, my Liege. I pray you inquire more particularly of them who are."

"Then you will not do my bidding, Friar? I ask a solution to my question. Kings' questions are wont to command answers."

"A friar may have a conscience as well as a King," returned Forrest calmly.

"And wherefore should your conscience forbid your answering my question, Father?" asked Henry more mildly.

"It forbids me to assert as surely true that which may be doubtful."

"Then you admit that there is a doubt?" questioned Henry eagerly.

Forrest saw his slip.

"Nay, I said not so, my Liege. I have told you, long ere this, my mind in the matter. What others may think cannot change that. They may be right in counselling you to seek this divorce; I do not think they are."

The King rose suddenly and went to the window. The park lay still and white under a thick coating of frost; the rays of the rising sun struck on the frost-laden boughs of the elms, and hung them with flashing many-hued jewels. Close to the casement was a spider's web encrusted with ice that the feeble sunlight had not succeeded in thawing. Henry watched it for a moment or two, his busy brain scarcely less persistent, in the face of renewed obstacles to his will, than the spinner of the web.

The Friar's lips moved in prayer. His exterior was calm, but deep down beneath the surface the conflict still raged within his soul—the terror and dread of violent death.

The King spoke suddenly.

"This matter must be settled soon, Father Forrest," he said; "our conscience must be at peace."

"It cannot so long as you are bent on this

divorce, my Liege. Rest comes not to wilful men with evil desires," returned Forrest quietly.

"Evil!" exclaimed Henry. "By Our Lady, Sir Priest, you are over bold! Have a care, if you value your life!"

Forrest stood boldly upright, and his eyes blazed again.

"Life is sweet to all, my Liege; I may not say that I do not value mine—I do. But if to have life means to play traitor to my trust—to stoop to advise you otherwise than according to my conscience, to the prejudice of your soul's salvation, then do I place my life in the hands of God who gave it, and commit my end to Him."

Henry shrank a little before the light in the old man's eyes, but his anger had risen, and he laid a fierce hand upon the Priest's arm.

"Marry, then! an you will not speak, you shall hang or burn, I care not greatly which!" he said brutally.

The Friar stood silent still, his will firmly set against uttering even the slightest word that might prejudice the Queen's cause, but his whole nature revolting, notwithstanding, against the consequences to himself that he clearly foresaw and realized.

A sound as of a dropped weapon or metallic object startled both King and Friar, and served to relieve the tension. Henry sprang forward and drew aside a heavy curtain of tapestry that



veiled the lower end of the room. There was no one there—nor any sign that any person had been.

“Strange!” he muttered, and turned again to Forrest, who had looked up at the sound, but made no movement in its direction.

“I crave your leave to withdraw, my Liege,” he said.

“Ay, get you gone! Get you gone!” said the King impatiently. “And see to it that you leave not the monastery until you hear our pleasure,” he added.

“The Queen?” questioned Forrest. “If her Grace should send for me?”

“The Queen’s Grace will not send for you; I will look to that.”

The Priest withdrew. Passing silently, with bent head, between the sentinels who stood on guard at the postern door, he gained the park. A tall, hooded figure in sweeping robes, with long pendant sleeves, stood in his path.

“One of my enemies overcome!” she said mockingly, “Friar Forrest at least will work me no further evil; he has signed his own death warrant this day.”

“Who are you, woman?” he asked, taken by surprise at the suddenness of the encounter.

“One whom you should know well, Father Forrest; one who would have been your friend had you not been her enemy. Listen!” She bent

forward suddenly and whispered a few words. The Priest started.

“Go your way,” he said sadly. “Alas! that a Christian woman should stoop so low. Go!” he added, pointing to the palace, “go back to the house you would ruin; go to your triumph, but be assured that your hour will come. When that hour strikes, remember that I foretold it to you; remember that who passes rough-shod over other men’s hearts shall be in his turn trodden down—ay, and trampled on. Go, vain woman; your hour is short; it will soon come to an end, and then——”

“What then?” she asked mockingly—“what then, Father Forrest?”

“Then—since you will have it—the judge and the——” She gave a sudden cry, and threw out her hands as though she would thrust him from her, and fled.

He passed his hand wearily across his brow and stood for a moment looking after her retreating figure, then he turned and continued his way to the monastery. Full well he knew that his time there would be short, that the hour of his trial would not be long delayed, yet the day passed and no message came from the King, no officer came to arrest him, and worn out with anxiety and struggle he sought solace in prayer.

The darkness of the early night was already falling. The sun had gone down in a blaze of frosty gold and crimson. He had watched it

from the porch of the church and dreamed of the glory of heaven, for to him it seemed certain that his days on earth were numbered. To his brethren he had said nothing of his interview with the King, nor of the tyrant's threats; they were already weighed down with anxieties, and he would not add to their burden. He was an old man, he argued; it would be better if the storm fell upon him than upon others who were more able to carry on the work of God. So, musing still, and struggling with his burden of apprehension, he stole into the church to pray.

Over the sanctuary brooded the spirit of peace. The voices of the world were hushed in that spot; and as the Friar prayed, the light faded, the old man's weary head fell forward, and he slept.

Through the darkened aisles came the sound of rushing wings. He looked up, but could see nothing. Slowly, as though from an infinite distance, came other sounds: the tramp of a marching army, and soft music, low and fragmentary, but very sweet. Forrest knelt upright and folded his hands, gazing upward with a rapt look upon his face. The sounds came nearer, they grew louder and more coherent, yet as they increased in volume and continuity they lost nothing of their sweetness. From the shadowed depths a figure emerged, indistinctly at first, but growing clearer as the Friar looked, until he saw a warrior, as it were, in armour of ancient days.

He had seen pictures of such on the pages of the illuminated missal that Friars used on solemn festivals.

He shrank from the visitor for a moment, but the warrior smiled at him, and his smile was as summer lightning among the hills, revealing a multitude of formless spirits, that the Priest knew to be the souls of departed warriors in bliss. He knelt upright still, for he was conscious of the presence of an unseen host, who came to bring peace to his sorely tried spirit. The warrior smiled again benignly, and Forrest spoke—his voice sounded harsh and loud after the soft music of the glorious band.

“Who art thou?” he demanded, and crossed himself, with sudden fear lest this might prove to be some snare of the enemy. A ripple of sound stirred the echoes of the empty church, and died away into a soft undertone as the figure answered:

“Brother, I am Derfel the Strong. Because I fought and conquered, it has been given to me to bring help to others in peril, who are my brothers in the strife. Long years ago, though to me it is but as yesterday, I vanquished the Dragon. And now I am sent to you, to be with you in the hour of your battle. Fear not, your strength shall not fail; in the day of battle I and these my comrades will encompass you about and deliver you, and you shall slay the Dragon. And for a pledge that I have spoken truly——” He ceased speaking,

and bending toward the Friar, he touched his eyes and his heart. And immediately he saw the multitude of the blessed ones who stood around, and his heart was filled with peace that surged to love and filled his whole being with strength and with desire for the combat. Then Derfel the Strong Champion spoke again, and his words were as the swelling of a triumphal anthem.

"Remember, and fear not!" he said. The voices died away into silence, and the glory faded into darkness, but Friar Forrest had fallen on his face before the mighty presence of God!

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## CHAPTER III

### THE LADY-IN-WAITING

FEBRUARY had come. The past weeks had brought but few changes. Father Forrest had apparently been forgotten by the King, who had made no comment when the Queen had sent for her chaplain. The Friar was not deceived, he knew that the storm had but blown over for a time, but his soul was at peace since the night of St. Stephen, and he went about his office calmly and cheerfully, so that none would have guessed the peril in which he stood.

Alison was downcast. Though Sir James had not failed to send her dutiful messages from time to time, he had not been in person to see her, and she was apprehensive lest all was not as well with him as his letters asserted. Hubert had been their messenger, and the little grey wherry with its dumb oarsman had generally come in the dusk of the evening, and she had learned to look for its arrival eagerly. Thus the first month of the new year had passed, and now chill February had

settled over the land with its provoking bursts of almost spring sunshine, that the cold dark clouds and heavy fogs always blotted out again. Since the days had begun to lengthen the frosts had hardened, and Alison shivered as she stood on the palace wharf shading her eager eyes with her hand, as she watched the western approach. The after-glow of the sunset shone on her face, bringing the well-defined features into sharp contrast with her dark green velvet robes. A lingering shaft of light caught a golden ornament in her hair, and a jewel flashed at her waist; but for this her figure would scarcely have been visible in the half-light against the background of shrubs.

It was seven days since Sir James' silent messenger had brought her a letter, and for three nights past she had stolen out at dusk in the hope that the little grey wherry might appear. Katharine had seemed to follow the course of Sir James' wooing with considerable interest, and had even asked Alison to let her see his letters, to the girl's secret dismay, though she might scarcely refuse to show them to the Queen, and when the failing light had been the signal for their busy needles to be laid aside, she had bidden her lady-in-waiting to go for a stroll.

"You are over white, Mistress Alison!" she had said. "Go down to the river for a while; the exercise will do you good," and Alison had gratefully obeyed. The cold wind swept up

sharply from the sea, and the girl stood more closely in the shelter of the shrubbery. Doubts and fears came and went by turns through her mind, and she was just about to return to the palace, when a dark speck shot suddenly out of the dying sunset. It came on swiftly, looming larger as it approached. Alison watched it anxiously, her hands clasped closely to her breast. For a little while she lost sight of it under the drooping boughs of the willow-trees, and she began to fancy she had been mistaken. But the dip of oars, and the long steady stroke that followed, told her that the boat was coming to the wharf. For a moment she pressed still farther into the shelter of the friendly bushes, but as the rower shipped his oars, and sprang ashore, she came forward, holding out her hand for the expected letter.

“Good-morrow, Hubert!” she said softly. He gave a sort of grunt, and thrusting his hand into his doublet he drew forth a folded paper bound with a silken string and sealed. Alison had her hand nigh on the missive, when a tall, slim youth, in a page’s dress, accosted the man :

“What is your errand?” he demanded. Hubert shook his head, signing to Alison to keep silent.

“Nay, answer me, fellow!” said the boy, “I would know what is your errand.” Hubert shook his head again, and the youth seized him roughly by the collar.



"Answer me! Answer me! By the Rood! but I will have an answer, fellow!" screamed the boy passionately.

The man answered not, and essayed to wrench himself free, when suddenly a burly figure came hastily down the stone steps of the terrace. Hubert saw him first, and unclenched his fists—it was the King!

"Leave him to me, Harry!" he called. "Give me the letter, sirrah!" he commanded, and stretched out his hand, but Hubert only shook his head again. His silence increased the anger of the King.

"Nay!" he shouted, "an you will not give it to me, I must e'en take it."

"Hubert!" exclaimed Alison; she had been surprised and frightened into silence, but fear lest Sir James' foster-brother should come to harm, gave her back her voice. Henry turned at the sound; he had not seen her in the gathering gloom.

"How now, Mistress Alison Ward! Why are you here at this hour?" he asked sternly.

"I came but to walk for a little while by the river, my Liege," she replied, and blushed uneasily.

"Who is this man?"

"Hubert Franklyn, my Liege, foster-brother to Sir James Blundell."

"To Sir James Blundell! Ho! Ho!" laughed

Henry. "Beshrew me, but you have chosen a discreet messenger, Mistress Ward! He hath no word to say for himself."

"The man is dumb, so please your Grace," she said more quietly.

"Dumb, is he? It may be that we can find means to make him speak," he hinted darkly.

"That were impossible, my Liege, since he hath already lost his speech for his discretion."

"You speak in riddles, lady!"

"His tongue hath been stolen from him, may it please your Grace; and for no other cause than that he could naught tell against the honour of a lady."

"Ha! this passes bearing. What man dares thus to maltreat our honest lieges?" he demanded fiercely.

"I know not, but I have heard it said that it was done at the behest of one high in the favour of your Grace."

"His name, girl!" Hubert gave utterance to a sound of dismay.

"Nay, I heard not his name," she said. "Pray you, my Liege, suffer the poor fellow to deliver me the letter which he hath brought me, and so to depart in peace."

"The letter! Nay, then, it seems that the dumb can find means to speak on occasion." She flushed rosy red, and her eyes fell before the coarsely admiring glance of the King.

"The letter is from Sir James Blundell—for

me," she said steadily, and looked him bravely in the face.

"A letter from your lover?" he asked.

"Yes, my Liege, a letter from my lover," she returned, a trifle scornfully, for all that he was the King.

"You are a strange messenger," said Henry, addressing himself to Hubert suspiciously; "yet, if you have indeed a letter, as this lady says, you may give it to her here and now; and then, get you gone with all despatch."

Hubert drew the missive from his doublet and handed it to Alison.

"Get you gone," said the King roughly. "After him, Harry! And see that he does not come back," he added.

The boy ran swiftly to the waterside and jumped into a skiff that lay there. Hubert had already shot into the shelter of the willows, and the page followed him.

"So you have a letter, Mistress Ward?" said the King. Alison looked up uneasily. "You should owe me some thanks," he continued.

"My Liege, I do thank you," she protested, and curtsying, added: "I crave your leave to withdraw."

"Not so fast—not so fast, mistress. May I not see the letter?"

"From my lover?" she said, with an indignant rising inflection on the word.

"Nay, nay; an you would rather not," he said, and took her by the arm. "You need not think to escape me, Mistress Ward," he said slowly; "you are not afraid of your King, pretty one? In good sooth, the Queen hath an eye for beauty now I think of it; and I have an eye for bravery. God's truth! you carried yourself gallantly in that passage, Mistress Alison; yet I have been told that you were over timid, and would do that for fear that promises would never gain from you."

Alison looked startled. "They do ill who gossip thus, playing lightly with a woman's fair fame," she said energetically.

Henry laughed. "Ho! ho! so they do, sweetheart, so they do. You have a pretty wit, Mistress Ward, but let me counsel you. Anger me not; I can be very terrible if I so will."

Alison trembled. "I pray you, my Liege, of your charity to let me go. The Queen——"

"The Queen will wait, an you tell her the King keeps you, pretty one," he said. "Fie! fie! that you should treat your King with such scant courtesy! Well, an you will go, you will. I will not compel you to stay. Here comes the Friar Forrest; how do you say? Shall I let you go—for to-day?" He had loosed his hold of her somewhat; with a sudden movement she freed herself and backed a little farther toward the step; then, as she gained the terrace, she fled.

Father Forrest had looked up in time to see the King loosen his hold ; a suspicion crossed his mind, and he scrutinized Henry's face anxiously as he descended the steps slowly and painfully.

The King went forward to meet him. "Come hither, Reverend Father!" he exclaimed. "Witness a most strange thing! Yon fair lady likes me not. I did but seek the King's privilege to kiss a pretty woman."

"'Tis well to see our maidens modest, my Liege, even though they dwell in the midst of a Court," said the old man.

"Peace, Friar! I desire not a sermon. I'll warrant me you'll scourge us roundly for our sins when Lent cometh. 'Tis scarcely Shrovetide yet, and I care not to be preached to now."

"I desire not to preach, my Liege; there be others more fit, and more learned, than the poor Friar."

"By the Mass! I warrant the poor Friar 'll preach even as I direct, for the quieting of our conscience and the good of the realm."

"Now, may God forbid, my Liege. You know my mind in this matter," said Forrest steadily.

The King laughed lightly. "Nay, I meant not to be over stern," he said, and stepped toward the skiff that lay waiting by the water's edge.

"To Westminster, Harry," he said, as he took his seat in the stern.

Father Forrest stood looking dreamily after

the disappearing boat. Not until it was lost to sight in the heavy mists that hung over the river did he turn away. Then he retraced his steps and walked slowly along the terrace.

"There is no safety for her at the Court," he mused ; "and yet her presence seems necessary to the Queen just now. Poor woman ! poor wife ! poor Queen ! Would that I could circumvent the plots that hedge you round and threaten your very life !" So musing, he passed the guard and gained the palace. The old forebodings had in part returned. He was smitten with the old fear, but it no longer had power to paralyze him ; blow for blow he struck back at the enemy, secure in the promise of ultimate victory that had been promised him on the night of St. Stephen by Derfel the Strong Champion.

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## CHAPTER IV

### THE KING'S PAGE

THE boat shot swiftly from the quay under the boy's strong quick strokes. Henry sat moodily in the stern, and though the boy looked at him furtively now and then, he did not dare to address him. The King spoke at last ; they were already getting into London ; lights glimmered in the windows of the houses, and the stream had narrowed.

"Pray you hasten, Hal, time passes, and I have promised to meet the ambassador to-night."

The boy bent his head silently, and the skiff shot through the water, cleaving it in its passage, and leaving a foaming wake that shone white in the gleam of the rising moon. Ere long they had passed the Tower, quickly shot under the dark arches of London Bridge, by Blackfriars and the Temple, and in a few moments more were at Westminster. The curfew was ringing, as the boat's keel grated on the low bank, and King and page sprang ashore.

The evening was frosty, and the King drew his cloak more closely about him, and pulled his hat down low over his brow ; then, as the boy came running to him, after making the boat fast, he threw his arm affectionately over his shoulders :

"I would that I *knew* !" he said uneasily, more to himself than to the page. "Harry ! I ween that the Queen is sending letters to the ambassador ; I would that I knew by whom. The girl is so young and indiscreet, I cannot think the Queen would choose her for her messenger. In sooth she is a pretty wench ; I had to let her have the missive, though 'twas almost against my better sense."

"Ay, my Liege, I like not yon dumb man either. I question much if he be really so. He *hears* fast enough, I warrant you, and knows how to fly too ; his strokes are long and powerful ; he shot under the willows by Greenwich like a bolt from a cross-bow, and there I lost him."

Henry laughed : "Let him go, dear lad, he is not worth our notice—but I would that I knew."

"He is Sir James Blundell's servant and foster-brother, so please your Grace," answered the boy.

"As good knight and true as any of my friends, Hal, albeit he is but a youth still. There be others I would beware of."

"Yet he loves the Lady Alison Ward," suggested the page, "and the Lady Alison loveth Queen Katharine, and is ever near her person."



Nay, I know more : it hath been told me that the ambassador frequently receives the knight in private, and they are well known to be friendly."

"Ha! Say you so, Harry! This matter must be looked to, or, by Our Lady! we shall be King no longer in this realm of ours. Come, Harry, I have to meet the ambassador forthwith, and then we must back to Greenwich with all speed, for the Queen must not hear of our absence."

They walked more swiftly over the meadows, that lay to the west of the Abbey, and, crossing the brook, soon entered the green park. A few moments rapid walking brought them to the great gate, where a sentinel challenged them.

"Tush, man! 'tis the King," said the page.

The man looked more closely: "Ay, I know now, 'tis the Duke of Richmond," he answered, and brought his sword to the salute. The King enjoined silence by a gesture, and entered the palace. In a moment the whole building was astir, lights blazed from the windows, and a page came hurriedly forward.

"The Lady Anne would have speech of your Grace," he said.

Henry glanced up quickly, then, beyond the page, and smiled, as he advanced to meet Anne.

"Well met, sweetheart," he said, taking her hand and pressing it tenderly. She bent the knee, but the King raised her.

"A boon!" she said softly, so that none but

the nearest of those who stood about could hear her.

"It is granted, lady. Pray you leave us," he added to the assembled company, who withdrew to a respectful distance, so that the lovers might converse unheard.

Henry walked slowly down the long hall ; Anne had taken him by surprise, for he had not known of her presence at the palace, and he wanted to gain time. Her long sweeping robes of yellow satin with hanging sleeves became her well. Her hair was coiled under a net of pearls strung on gold thread, and her cap was edged with the same jewels. "You are fair, my lady," said the King.

Anne affected to blush : "Your Grace is pleased to jest," she replied, and tears trembled on her long lashes.

"Nay, sweetheart, I did not jest ; to me you are, and ever will be, the fairest lady in Christendom."

"Nay, Henry, you have said that ever often, and yet our affair is at a deadlock. I had word, that even to-night Chapuys hath a despatch from the Emperor claiming that you dismiss me, and take the Queen into favour again."

Henry looked at her quickly : "It passeth understanding how things be noised abroad. I dare swear the ambassador knows naught of the letter he doubtless hath for me."

Anne laughed, a silvery, scornful laugh.

"He knoweth his master's mind only too well, Henry. Belike he hath procured the letter."

The King's brow darkened: "Did I think so, Lady Anne, I would hang him like a dog."

"The ambassador?" she smiled, raising her eyebrows.

"Ay, sweetheart, the ambassador," he said, passing his arm about her. She drew away from him.

"Your Grace forgets," she said, "though we be out of earshot, there are eyes in plenty to watch the King's wooing."

"Well, then, another time," said Henry, raising her hand to his lips. "I will do my best with the ambassador, fair lady, but I may not seem to depart from custom. When the divorce is pronounced I care not; but as we have still a point to gain, let us be wary."

He led her by the hand back to her attendants and dismissed her with a smile, standing to watch her as she disappeared at the door.

He turned to find the ambassador at his elbow, looking sternly before him with folded arms.

"From the Emperor," he said, handing the King a paper sealed with many seals. "His Majesty is pressed for a reply," he continued, as Henry broke the seals and glanced hurriedly over the letter.

A frown settled on the King's brow, and he crushed the paper in his hand.

"This must to the Council, sir!" he said. "The Queen's affair is pending now, I cannot speak of it before the matter is settled. In truth," he added more calmly, "I am with the Emperor in this; that I wish the thing arranged to his satisfaction. Have you ever," he continued, pacing the hall slowly and, with a wave of his hand, inviting Chapuys to do the same—"have you ever felt your conscience and your inclination at variance? That is my position. Tell the Emperor that while I love, esteem, and respect the Queen, while I know her to be the truest wife and noblest Queen that ever shared a throne, my conscience bids me pause, lest in taking my brother's wife I sin against my own soul." He stopped speaking; Chapuys bent a long, scrutinizing look upon him. It was hard to believe that the man was not in earnest. But he had seen with his own eyes that very night—and there was the Emperor.

"I will report faithfully what your Grace hath said, and the doubt that you have discovered to me," he said coldly. "Yet, in the Emperor's opinion, the doubt hath appeared somewhat tardily; and he liketh not the talk anent the Lady Anne Boleyn."

"Enough, sir! Enough! The Lady Anne hath not offended in aught; I will be surety for her. Go to! a lady's good name is all that she hath. Fie! my lord ambassador, if any of my Court had so spoken, I should have known how to deal with them."

Chapuy's bit his lip.

"I did but mine errand," he said sturdily. "I pray your Grace to give me an answer for my master the Emperor on this count else."

Henry stopped suddenly and faced Chapuy's.

"Get you gone!" he said roughly. "We are ever complaisant. You know our will; see that your answer corresponds to it," he added, and smoothed out the crushed paper that he still held in his hand. "As for this, I shall lay it before my Council, they shall be the arbiters."

The ambassador bowed, and turned away.

"The combat is to the death," he muttered, as he strode down the long hall without deigning a recognition of the salutations of the assembly, and disappeared behind the curtains that hung over the entrance.

The King looked so formidable that none durst approach him, and a dead silence reigned. None had heard his speech with Chapuy's, and there were but few surmises as to its purport, for that the King was angry was patent to all, and it was generally supposed that the matter of the interview concerned the Queen's affair.

Henry turned at length and walked towards the assembly.

"The Duke of Richmond," he called. The page sprang forward.

"Nay then, dear lad, I fear me that we have made but a sorry night's work of it," he said

wearily. "We must to Greenwich with all speed. I would not that the Queen should know aught of the ambassador's mission. The Cardinal is here too, belike, and I care not greatly to meet him to-night."

"The Cardinal! I like him not, my Liege. I distrust him more than any. He would fain run with the fox and hunt with the hounds. 'Tis a wily old priest with a fair good grip on this world, in case, perchance, he might lose the next and so be fooled of both." The King laughed boisterously.

"Shall I tell him, Hal, that the Duke of Richmond hath so described him?"

"I care not, my Liege; I fear him not," answered the page proudly.

"Nay, Hal, *you* have no cause to fear him; yet be not too bravely spoken—'tis an old fox, and knows the ways of the hunters."

They passed through the hall, and out again into the moonlight. From an upper window the Lady Anne watched their departure. As the King passed the gateway a handkerchief fluttered to his feet. He stooped to raise it, and turned his eyes upward to where she stood looking after them. With a slight wave of his hand, he carried the kerchief to his lips, and then thrust it into his doublet. The page affected not to see, but in the darkness he hazarded a smile. They had left the palace by St. James's Street, and made their way

to the river by Whitehall, keeping the fields on their right.

"Touching the knight, Sir James Blundell," said Henry, pausing in his walk. "Tell me again, Hal. You said that he was in league with Chapuys?"

"Nay, I know not for certain, my Liege, but 'tis the gossip of the Court that he goeth frequently to meet him, and it hath been mooted that their conferences touch the Queen's affair."

Henry thought for a moment.

"I would it were some other than Blundell, for I knew his father well; he saved my life in France; he was a right gallant knight. If one might buy his son——" he said musingly. "Yet the divorce must be accomplished, and right speedily. In such a cause e'en friends must be content to waive friendship. I will send him to the Tower; there he will be safe enough, for he can do no further mischief, and when all is settled he shall go, for I like not to harm the youth."

"And for the Lady Alison, my Liege?"

"I war not with women, Hal. She shall be watched. She is too fear-full to do much harm, and yet—I mind me she spoke up bravely enough when it was a case of her lover's letter going astray. Well a day! it's a woman's way to brave all for love, and she hath a right loyal little heart, I ween. 'Tis pity I dare not trust to one so weak—she might be useful else."

He threw his arm over the boy's shoulder.

"And you are all," he said, "my son—my only one. You are just what I was at your age, Hal—myself again. In you I live afresh. 'Tis pity you have the bar sinister, boy; you would have made a goodly King!" He drew the boy to him passionately, then, with a curt "Let's on," led the way to the river, followed by the Duke.

From the dark shadow of a cluster of shrubs two men stepped into the moonlight. They waited till the sound of oars assured them of the King's departure.

"The letter, Hubert, give me the letter," said the taller one hastily. The man shook his head, holding out his hands and turning them palms downward to show that he had nothing.

"What! Why?" began Sir James. The man laid his finger on his lips and made a sign that signified "spies." "Come inside, then," said the knight, and they crossed the open space before the Abbey, and turned into a narrow lane that led to the river. The clock of the Abbey began to strike; for a moment they stood and counted the solemn strokes.

"To-morrow we must be far from here," said the knight thoughtfully. The dumb man could not answer him, but he put his hand into that of his foster-brother pleadingly.

"Ay, Hubert, you come with me," answered Sir James, "and we must find means to send word to the Lady Alison."

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## CHAPTER V

### "TO THE KING!"

"THERE is no time to be lost, Hubert. I will write a letter for the ambassador, and you must contrive to give it to him. I shall go immediately toward Wales. In the mountains there we shall be able to keep out of the way until this trouble blows over. I would that I might see the Lady Alison once more, but since that may scarcely be, I will write a letter to her, too. You will join me as soon as the two missives are safely delivered."

Hubert grunted as he threw open the door of the house that stood back from the narrow lane behind a double hedge of hawthorn bushes, and stood aside to allow his master to precede him into the dining-room. The knight threw his plumed cap on the table, and stooped carelessly to caress Boris, the bloodhound, who had risen lazily and was stretching himself with a great yawn. The fire was burning low, and the man threw on more logs and stirred the embers into a

blaze, until the flames rose merrily into the wide chimney and illumined the big room with their flickering light.

Sir James went to the window to assure himself that it was well secured, and that the heavy damask curtains were closely drawn. Then he seated himself at the corner of the table nearest the fire, and took up a quill. For some reason or other the point failed to please him, and he rose to fetch a knife from a writing-table at the farther end of the room. A low growl from Boris attracted his attention, and he lifted his head to listen. There was a sound of footsteps in the lane; they drew nearer uncertainly and hesitatingly. Boris sniffed uneasily, and then broke into a joyous bark.

"Peace!" ordered the knight, and the hound looked at him whining and licking his hand. "Lie down, sirrah! you will betray us," whispered Sir James, but even then his hand rested on the dog's head in a lingering caress. There was a timid knock at the great door, and Hubert came forward looking at his master questioningly.

"Open to them, Hubert," he whispered, "'tis a woman's voice. I will not be seen; you understand?" The man nodded, and waited with his hand on the door until the knight had retreated down the long passage, where he stood in the deep shadow of the staircase. Hubert assured himself that Sir James was out of sight before

drawing back the heavy bolt and throwing the door open, yet not wide enough for more than one person to enter for fear of treachery. A man wrapped in a long dark cloak stood on the steps.

"From the Queen," he said, and threw back his cloak, revealing the features of Patch, the Queen's jester. "I am escorting a lady," he added gravely, standing back to allow his companion to be seen.

"I would see Sir James Blundell at once," she said; "I have a message from the Queen, and a letter that she hath charged me to deliver with my own hand. Be speedy, good Hubert; time passes, and I must join the Queen at the Observants' church at Greenwich at the hour of matins."

Sir James came forward. "Lady Alison!" he exclaimed; "come in, come in quickly! Hubert, close the door and open to none. Take Master Patch and give him some supper, but not wine, mind you, Hubert; he hath need of all his wits to bring this affair to a safe ending for the lady," he added in an undertone. "Bring some refreshments to the dining-room. Come, Lady Alison." He shut the door behind him, and turned to the girl.

"Beshrew me, but you have a brave heart," he cried, and laughed a little at the strangeness of the adventure. Alison laughed too.

"I can laugh now, Sir James, but I have been

trembling all the way, for fear lest any should discover mine errand and rob me of the Queen's package. Now I feel safe," she added, with a bewitching smile, as she seated herself in the chair he had placed for her.

"Safe!" he echoed, "ay, Lady Alison, but not for long—but that is another story. Let us first to the Queen's business! She knew that I had sent to the palace to-night?"

"She asked me if you had sent, Sir James, and insisted on seeing the letter."

"And you showed it to her?" he asked anxiously.

"She is the Queen, Sir James! How could I refuse her? She is much interested in you, and hath sent me to-night with a warning—thus much she told me of my mission, and added, 'I would fain reward him for his fidelity, yet, having no money, nor any power to serve him otherwise, bid him accept this jewel. 'Tis all I have to offer him, and it may be that he will keep it in memory of Katharine's gratitude.'" Alison handed him a package as she finished speaking, and a letter. He took them from her hand, and laid them on the table.

"Nay, Sir James, read the letter. I have to take an answer to the Queen; not a written answer she commands, but a message that I can deliver by word of mouth. Letters are dangerous in these days, she says, and she would not hazard

one being found in my possession, seeing that a message will serve her purpose. For the rest, if I am questioned, she hath sent me to carry succour to an old Spanish pilgrim, who hath brought her a relic from Compostella. Wherefore she confided me to the care of Patch, who, for all his motley, is no fool, and as trusty as a man may be.”

Sir James broke the seal and glanced over the Queen’s missive, his brows contracted, then cleared, and a smile was on his lips when he looked at the girl again.

“Tell the Queen, Lady Alison, that I thank her Grace; that I had already overheard somewhat of the King’s intention, and that before daybreak I shall be on my way to the Welsh mountains, whence I may make my way to the coast and so to France, should need arise. Tell her that I thank her Grace, both for her warning and for the manner of it; and for the jewel, tell her that I will never part with it while life lasts. Tell her I kiss her hand and wish her all good fortune, protection from her enemies, and a speedy end to all her troubles. For the rest of her behest, it shall be done to-night. Hubert will take the letter to the ambassador before joining me. You will remember all that, Lady Alison?”

“I shall not forget, Sir James. And now I must be going, for we must be at Greenwich at midnight.”

“How came you?”

“By the river—only I think we came not so

near your house as we might have done, not knowing it. We crept up in the shadow of the Abbey, fearing with every step lest we might be seen and stopped. Our return will be easier."

"Ay, I will go with you." She caught her breath.

"No, no," she said brokenly, "you must not come. I will not have you run into unnecessary danger——" He stopped her.

"And you? Lady Alison, am I a cur, that I should let you run any further risk than can be avoided?"

"The Queen's behest! Remember, you are not free," she whispered. A great sob broke from him, and he threw himself at her feet.

"Hear me, Lady Alison!" he said. "You are my queen—my life. Sweetheart, this is no time for a man to woo a wife, yet I cannot suffer you to go without a word. You have been pleased to play the lover to me for the Queen's sake, I being not a make-believe lover all the while. You knew it, did you not? Could you help but know that the Queen's lady was my queen?"

"You think we poor maids are very blind, Sir James! Nay, then, I am too poor an actor to have played a part so long. Did *you* not know, Sir James?" Her face was turned from him, so that he did not see the flush that burned her cheeks, nor the brightness in her eyes. Somehow he got possession of her hand, of both hands.

“Nay then, my queen,” he said intensely, “I am your liege man, before heaven and earth for ever!” She bent toward him then.

“I pray you rise, Sir James!” she said sweetly, and rose to her feet. For a moment they remembered nothing either of danger, or of fear, or of flight for freedom, or of perils to be run before daybreak, for they stood in an enchanted land apart from all the world. The whining of Boris at the door broke the spell, and Hubert entered with a tray. He appeared not to have noted how the Lady Alison’s hand fell from the knight’s shoulder, nor the sudden move that Sir James made to the fire, yet a curious expression of contentment, that came near to being a smile, hovered about his lips. Sir James poured out a glass of wine.

“Drink this, Lady Alison,” he said. She made a little grimace, but obeyed him.

“To the King!” she said, and he understood. “I go now, Sir James. Call Patch,” she commanded. Hubert hurried to execute her order.

“Good-bye, Sir James. God bless and prosper you, and bring you back safely,” she said bravely, and lifted her face to his. He bent and kissed her on the brow.

“The blessing of God on you for ever, Lady Alison,” he said. “I come not, since you will have it so, and time presses. I have to write to the ambassador. Hubert, go to the water-side

with the Lady Alison and see her safely aboard." He stood for one more moment with his hand on the bolt of the door, then he set it back silently, and stepped aside for them to depart.

His letter to the ambassador was but brief, and when Hubert returned it was ready. He gave a few hasty instructions to his trusty servant, and made a few hurried preparations for his own departure. Hubert had gone forward with his horse. A sudden thought struck him : " What of Boris ?" He could not take him with him, and the poor brute would have to be left alone ; besides, they might use him to track him down. There was no time for hesitation ; the dog lay sleeping still before the dying fire. The man looked at him, and the dog opened his eyes and gave a joyful whine, and thumped the floor with his great tail. Tears blurred the man's vision ; for Alison's sake he dare not take chances—for the Queen's sake. His sword flashed—he never turned to look back, but rushed out into the night, his red blade still unsheathed, and the low deathwhine of a trusted friend ringing in his ears.

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## CHAPTER VI

### MATINS

ALISON drew her hood closely over her face. The memory of Sir James' kiss on her brow sent the blood tingling to her cheeks, and she forgot that it was dark and that the jester had not seen. They rowed across the river at Westminster, and kept in the shadow of the Surrey side. The girl breathed more freely when they had passed Southwark with no untoward incident, for the rest of the journey bade fair to be both quick and easy with the tide running down rapidly to the sea.

They were passing swiftly and silently through a crowd of vessels—fishing-boats, barges, or trading ships from France or Spain, when the jester looked up sharply and craned his neck forward. With a motion enjoining silence on Alison, he shipped his oars, caught with his hands at the side of a barge that lay moored in the tideway, and brought the skiff into the deeper shadow of its hull. Alison caught her breath and threw back her head to listen. There was a splash of

oars and a wherry shot by them, so close that the girl thought she might have touched it with her hand.

"Hasten, Hal!" she heard a voice cry. "I would not that the Queen should know that we had been to Westminster." She gave a great gasp, and pulled her hood closely over her face again, while they lay still waiting for the King to pass. When the wherry had become a mere speck in the uncertain light they slid silently from their refuge under the shadow of the barge and drifted down with the tide, the jester keeping the skiff in the shadow of the bank, with an occasional long steady pull that made no splash on the black water.

They ran into the shadow of the willows, the bank was steep and a little slippery with the frost, but their landing was accomplished in safety, and they walked warily by a circuitous route to the monastery. A faint glimmer of light came from the windows of the church, then it disappeared. Alison stole round to the private door that was used by the Queen and her household, and waited. The sound of low chanting told her that the office had already commenced, and she crept into the church. For a little while she could see nothing; then she made out the figure of the Queen kneeling in the shadow of the Lady Chapel. Hastily divesting herself of her cloak, she slipped into the chapel and knelt beside her, a pace behind. Her

entrance had not been observed by any of the ladies present, but Katharine turned her head slightly, as if to assure herself that all was well, and then addressed herself to her prayers as before. Through the office Alison knelt or stood with the rest, but her thoughts were far away with the good knight who was fleeing from the King's threats, and when at last she prayed, it was for protection for Sir James Blundell and Hubert on their journey, for the Queen's Grace that she might speedily come to an end of her troubles, and for herself that some day she might be able to reward Sir James for his faithful service.

The chanting died away, the last prayer had been said, the last "Amen" still quivered on the air when the Queen rose. Her ladies followed her from the church, and together they passed to the palace as silently as the friars to their cells.

"The Lady Alison will attend me to-night," said the Queen, dismissing her attendants, and Alison followed her into her chamber. "Shut the door, child, and draw the curtains," said Katharine, seating herself wearily in a low chair. "Now stir the fire," she continued, and Alison threw on more logs, for the frosty night made the Spanish lady shiver with the cold. "Come here, Lady Alison," she continued kindly, pushing forward a stool at her feet. Alison knelt. "Nay, child, you are surely tired. What said Sir James?"

"That he is your Grace's servant ; that he thanks his Queen for her favour, for her letter ; that for the jewel, he will wear it while life lasts in memory of his Queen."

"And of the message for the ambassador?"

"He sends it before the dawn—nay, before he leaves, and he is away by this—" said Alison.

The Queen noted the catch in her lady's voice.

"Are you *very* sad, child? If he had not gone he would have been thrown into the Tower, and the Tower holds fast what is confined to it ; and Kings change, Lady Alison. Ah, me!" she sighed.

The girl's hand went out to her impulsively ; then, as she remembered that it was the Queen who spoke, she flushed crimson.

"Nay, sympathy is a royal gift, little Alison ; you have no cause to blush. Alas ! poor Katharine hath few sympathizers, and fewer friends, yet you have been both—you and Sir James Blundell." A tear forced itself between Alison's eyelids, and splashed on the Queen's hands, that still held the girl's in their clasp. "A pearl," said the Queen softly, and bending kissed her lady on the brow.

"Your Grace is too kind," said the girl, and blushed deeply, for the Queen's kiss had revived her memory of Sir James' embrace.

Katharine laughed softly.

"So—you had a talk with Sir James Blundell?" she asked gently.

Alison looked up quickly, and saw the Queen's eyes looking into hers very steadily.

"He said——" she began, and faltered.

"There, that will do, child. That was for yourself alone. But, tell me, are you promised to him?"

"For ever, so please your Grace," responded the girl solemnly.

The Queen drew her hands gently from Alison's and laid them on her head.

"God bless and keep you, Lady Alison, and preserve you from troubles like ours. But if woe come to you, child, and it comes to most, look upward, let not your courage fail; at the worst it will end with life, and life is short. Come, help me to disrobe; 'tis time we went to rest."

For a few moments she knelt in prayer, then she submitted herself to Alison's ministrations. The girl went deftly about her task, and it was not long before Katharine turned to dismiss her. "Stay!" she said. "For to-night, Lady Alison, I pray you sleep in the ante-room. I have sent away Donna Maria, and I would not be alone."

With a smile Alison signified her willingness to remain in attendance on the Queen, and withdrew to the little room that lay beyond the Queen's and communicated with it.

For a long while she lay awake pondering over the events of the day that had brought her so much of anxiety, of adventure, of love. Surely,

most of all, of love. And if to love was added pain, that is the way of the little god who heals with a wound, and pierces to make whole. Now and again an owl hooted in the ivy outside her window, or the bare trees in the park rustled in the frosty breezes ; and then she heard the cry of the watch below :

“ Four of the clock, and all’s well ! ” and so fell asleep.

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## CHAPTER VII

### THE HUT IN THE FOREST

SIR JAMES rode forward moodily. It was irksome, although he was accustomed to Hubert's silence, to hear no voice save his own. They had ridden mostly by night, avoiding the highways and choosing the less frequented bridle-paths in the shelter of the woods, thus adding considerably to the length of their journey, for they had had to make several détours in order to cross streams or to avoid the neighbourhood of great houses, where they might have been recognized. So it was that the dawn of the third day found them no further on their way than Derby, and both their horses, to say nothing of themselves, badly in need of food and rest.

"We must turn to the west here, Hubert," said his master wearily. Hubert's face brightened, then he straightened himself suddenly and his hand went to his side. The knight looked up and saw a couple of stout archers standing in the path he had indicated, as if to bar their progress. They

were attired in jerkins and hose of russet, with flat caps of the same hue, and their lower arms and legs were bare, and bronzed with exposure to the weather. Sir James turned his horse's head toward them.

"None can pass this way, Sir Knight," they said respectfully, and stood shoulder to shoulder, so that in order to pass them he would be compelled to ride over them. He drew in his rein, for he suspected a trap.

"Give place, sirrahs!" he cried. "I do but mine own errand, and reck not of yours."

There was a hurried consultation between the two men.

"Your name and style?" demanded the spokesman.

"By whose command? Nay, out of my path, sirrah! an you would not feel the weight of my weapon; it hath slain dogs before now," he said, and winced, remembering Boris.

Hubert gave utterance to a warning growl, and the knight turned, to find that they were surrounded by some twenty men of the band.

"Well spoken, Sir Stranger," said a man, who appeared to be their leader, alighting from his horse.

"This passes bearing!" exclaimed the knight. "Who are ye that hinder a soldier of fortune from his affairs?"

"A soldier of fortune—is it indeed so?" asked



the man, coming closer and looking intently on the face of Sir James. "Nay then, that are we all here—soldiers of fortune, every man of us. A free life and a merry one, Sir Knight; an you choose to join us, we ask no questions and tell no names."

"I go further," said Sir James haughtily. "Since you hold the forest, suffer me and my servant to ride to the west—we have pressing affairs," he added, after a moment's hesitation.

"After you have eaten and rested. Your horses are jaded, or I am no true woodsman, and for soldiers of fortune the night is better travelling than the day. Pray you follow me."

The knight dismounted somewhat unwillingly.

"We can do nought against these odds, Hubert," he said. "We must e'en do their pleasure for the nonce."

At a sign from the leader one of the archers led away the horses by another path, and the travellers followed their host into the mazes of the wood. They came out into a clearing presently, a sort of little knoll that fell away from a cliff of reddish rock. The bare trees were closely massed around the place, and the ground was covered with a carpet of dried leaves. In front of the cliff was a thick growth of brushwood. Pushing this aside the leader of the outlaws, for so the knight judged them to be, showed them a cave hollowed out of the rock. In it were several heaps of leaves and a great pile of skins.

"I will send you refreshments," said the outlaw, "and then I pray you rest until sundown, when your horses shall be brought to you, and we will set you on your way."

"I thank you for your courtesy, sir," replied Sir James, "and I hope that the chance to requite it will come my way."

"I look not for requital, Sir Knight. My comrades and I take freedom by force in lieu of durance behind stone walls. Do you follow me?"

"I do—my case——" he began, and stopped, for two of the archers appeared bearing trenchers liberally supplied with smoking hot venison and a kind of bread baked in the embers. To each guest was brought a hunting-knife and a horn of mead.

"Fall to, friends," said their host. Sir James seated himself on a big stone at the entrance to the cave, and signed to Hubert to follow his example. He spoke little, for they had ridden all night and were weary. The outlaw watched them, wondering that Hubert did not speak, though he waited assiduously on his master, watching to anticipate every want.

"Get your own food, Hubert; it is every man for himself here," said Sir James.

The outlaw smiled.

"A faithful servant and a discreet, he speaks not," he said, with a nod of approval.

Hubert gave utterance to a growl of distrust.

"Nay then, he speaks not, because a King's creature hath denied him power to speak, seeing that he would not speak at his bidding."

The outlaw's hand went to his weapon.

"A curse on their cowardice!" he cried, "who would so misuse a man for spite that he had a bigger soul than they recked of. I give you greeting, friend," he said, offering his hand to Hubert. The man looked at him intently for a moment, and raised it to his lips. Then he stood suddenly erect and made a rapid sign. "Nay then, no names—'tis against our rules," laughed their host. "And now, if you have eaten enough, I will e'en leave you to rest. Your horses will be safe, and you may sleep in peace, for I will set a watch, though there is scarce need of that, for but few pass through the forest hereabouts, unless it be a pilgrim on his journey to Holywell, or a man in a case like to our own." He put his fingers to his lips as he finished speaking, and blew a call like the note of a robin thrice repeated. A man crept through the undergrowth that masked the cave.

"See to it that our guests' beds are spread," he said, "and set a watch, that their slumbers be not disturbed till sundown. I shall return then to drink the stirrup-cup with you, good sirs," he added, doffing his cap as he gave them farewell. The archer shook together two or three of the heaps of leaves for each of the travellers, and

covered them with skins taken from the pile in the cave, adding to each a further pelt to serve for covering. Then, having partially screened the opening of the cave with branches, he left them.

"'Tis well, Hubert," said Sir James, when the man had taken his departure, "we can trust our host. I cannot recall his name, yet I could swear that I have seen his face before to-day, and in goodly company forsooth." Hubert made a rapid succession of signs, finishing by drawing the edge of his hand across the back of the knight's neck significantly.

"Ha! say you so, Hubert. Nay, then, we are in good hands, and may e'en sleep in peace."

It was late in the afternoon when the knight stirred on his couch of leaves, and stretched his limbs with a sense of renewed life and vigour. Hubert was ready to attend him.

"'Tis time we were away," he said, rising to his feet, and submitting to his servant's endeavours to remove the travel stains from his person. "The wind blows cold, man. Hath our host been here yet?" Hubert shook his head, and stood ready to hand his sword to his master, who had laid aside the weapon with the heavier articles of his attire when he lay down to rest.

"I pray you, suffer me to intrude upon your privacy, Sir Knight!" cried a friendly voice from without.

"Welcome, mine host, since I may call you by no other name," returned Sir James. In another moment the extemporized screen was removed by unseen hands, and there followed supper, borne in by two more of the russet-clad archers, and set forth with some attempt at ceremony on the flat stone before the door, which made an excellent substitute for a table.

"I would sup with you to-night, friends," said their host genially. "'Tis not often that I have visitors here in the greenwood, but to-night we will throw ceremony to the winds, eh, good sirs?"

Sir James signified his pleasure in the arrangement, and the outlaw immediately clapped his hands, at which signal each of the company was served with a trencher, hunting-knife, and drinking horn set in silver. The supper might well have graced a board in one of the great houses. To a dish of freshly caught trout, succeeded a haunch of venison and a pair of wild ducks.

"We help ourselves here," said the outlaw merrily, "to what Providence sends us. I fear me his Grace might look askance on our board to-night, but a man has to live one way or another."

Sir James laughed. "Here's to the Knight of Sherwood!" he cried, raising the horn to his lips.

The outlaw frowned. "No names, Sir Knight—no names! We ask no names and beg of your courtesy to confer none."

"Nay, I did not name any man," returned Sir James; "you mistook me."

"I did but warn you, Sir Traveller; a still tongue maketh a wise head."

"Ay, and saveth much mischief—you are right, sir. I cry you pardon for my indiscretion."

"'Tis granted, sir. And now to business. This forest is held by my men, therefore I pray you to take an escort with you. A couple of my men shall ride with you two days and carry provisions for your journey. Then, at parting they shall put you in the right way and so bid you farewell."

"For this courtesy also, many thanks, sir; I scarce deemed to find such gentle handling when we ran across your archers this morning. I am fain to return your hospitality on some future day."

The outlaw waved his hand. "I but seek to undo the wrongs that I cannot hinder," he said.

Sir James looked up quickly. "I would I dared to give voice to my thoughts," he said.

"Well?" answered the outlaw, drawing himself up sternly; "an you will, you will. You are warned——"

"Nay, I will but say that were I free, I would solicit admission to your band for myself and for my servant, who also hath suffered somewhat at the hands of those who should have shielded his weakness."

The outlaw's eyes grew moist.

"My friend, trust me. Things are better as they are. The wrong is too deep to be righted by man. To shed men's blood for vengeance is a crime that cries to Heaven for retribution. Here in the forest I command my men, they love me and obey my slightest word; we have full and plenty of that which Heaven sends us, and we wrong no man. Now go in peace, my friend. Should danger threaten you, or want, come back. We have named no names—you no longer remember the outlaw of the greenwood."

"Farewell!" exclaimed Sir James, as he mounted his good steed while Hubert held the stirrup.

"A toast!" cried the outlaw, tendering the knight a horn of sack. "To your good fortune, friend—and to your lady!"

"To the Knight of the Greenwood and his archers!" responded Sir James, and the toast drunk, he offered his hand to the outlaw in sign of good-fellowship.

"My thanks, and farewell!" called the knight, as he doffed his plumed cap and rode away bare-headed until he could no longer see his host for the screening boughs. "That is an honest man and true, Hubert, and one sorely dealt with. But now to our journey; the moon rises brightly, yet there be signs of a change, for the clouds drift fast across the stars." He put spurs to his horse, and they cantered forward, following the two archers who rode ahead of them through the

paths of the forest. For two nights they proceeded thus, riding always to the west, and on the second morning the archers left them, refusing the angel that Sir James would fain have bestowed upon them, and leaving with him the remainder of the provisions they had brought.

The snow began to fall in showers as they reached the mountain ridge on the Welsh border and entered the woods again in the valley below. They rode in silence, Sir James following Hubert, who was a native of the country, and had plans of his own which the knight could not entirely understand, owing to his servant's lack of power to explain them. In time they arrived at the Vale of Maw and beheld Cader Idris before them, with its summit half covered in snow wreaths and its base clothed in a tangle of bare brown branches. Before them lay a little open space, with the river beyond, and a dark hut standing out against the snow-laden undergrowth behind it. The ground was covered with a thin coating of snow, in which were the traces of recent footsteps. Hubert pointed to the hut, looking beseechingly at Sir James.

"What would you, Hubert, my poor fellow?" asked the knight compassionately, for he was puzzled at the man's gestures. There were tears in the honest fellow's eyes as he pointed to his dumb lips and signed to Sir James to go forward to the hut. He made a movement in its direction,



when the curtain that hung before the door was pushed aside and an old woman stepped from behind it. She gave a feeble cry as her eyes fell on Hubert, and held out her hands to him. He ran to her and gathered her in his arms, while Sir James followed wonderingly. She looked to Hubert for an explanation; he shook his head and pointed to his lips. She gave him a puzzled look and turned to the knight who had doffed his cap and now bent to look more closely at her. A sudden revelation came to him.

"Megan!" he cried, and stood still—she was his foster-mother! and she did not know him—she had not known Hubert for a moment, and yet he was her own son. Sir James strove to remember her native Cymric that he had learned from her in his childhood. At first the words came slowly from his unaccustomed tongue, but by degrees, as memory was stirred, old phrases came to him, and he told the story of Hubert's devotion and suffering to the mother who divined from his broken sentences more than they told her.

"My son!" she said gently, and Sir James knelt at her feet.

"Bless me," he murmured, and she laid her trembling hand on his head.

"God bless thee, Sir James, because thou hast been faithful to thy kin; God bless thee and thy house. Hast thou a lady, yes?"

"No, not yet ; there is a maid——"

"God bless her, too, Sir James, and pardon those who have so dealt with my son," she added with dignity. "My life is nearly over now; there remains but one duty unfulfilled. I know not when it shall be accomplished, and I care not now how soon. Hubert, look to thy duty. Such shelter as this hut affords you are welcome to," she added, turning to the knight.

"Thanks, good mother," he said, supporting her to the stool that was the only seat in the hut, for she was weak.

She made a movement to decline it.

"It is your rightful place, good mother," he said, and she protested no more. For a time they were silent, the knight fearful lest the aged woman's strength should fail her, and she with her latent mother-love stirred exceedingly, so that she trembled with the emotions that their sudden coming had evoked.

"Whence came you?" she asked at last, and Sir James told her of his sore peril, and strove to tell her something of the doings at Court, and ceased, for with the old woman's eyes piercing him through and through, he dared not tell her of the world's infamy.

"There be strange doings, and stranger to come," she said, with a flush of inspiration. To those who dwell apart from the world in the solitude of the mountains it may well hap to hear

sometimes the whispers of angelic voices, to see the veil sometimes worn so thin that their old eyes may peer into the hidden mysteries of the future"—Megan rose and prophesied :

"There will come a night upon England and upon Wales ; in the darkness many shall perish, and some shall live ; yet often they that would live shall die, and they that die not shall wish not to live. The darkness is coming, is coming upon the land ; the clouds shall come from the east and cover it. In the night I see stars arise and flames of fire." Her voice trailed off into silence.

Sir James fell on his knees beside the old woman.

"May it be averted!" he said fervently. Hubert threw himself beside the knight.

"Bless your children, Megan," said Sir James, "that they share not in that prophecy."

She put forth her hands and rested them on their bent heads. "The blessing of the aged is honoured by God," she said ; "blessed be you my sons in weal or woe, in life or death."

"Amen!" said the knight, and rose and went to the door of the hut. The sky had cleared, and in the west the evening star rose beyond the mountain. He folded his hands, and prayed for Alison and for the Queen and for his own need.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A CONSPIRACY

THE warm June sunshine lay in a golden glory on the Castle of Windsor and on the tops of the tall trees in the park, and glistened in the waters of the Thames as they passed by on their leisurely way to the sea. In one of the state rooms sat the Lady Anne Boleyn, with a table before her on which lay writing materials and a few books. But for the moment the open volume which lay before her had ceased to hold her attention, for her eyes were turned dreamily upon the pleasant prospect which she could behold by slightly turning her head. Her face wore an expression of abstraction; once she frowned and muttered to herself, half rising from her seat, but on second thoughts she settled herself again more comfortably, and took up the neglected book. But in a little while she closed it again and rose with an impatient sigh.

“Master Cromwell, to speak with you, madam”  
—thus a page in the royal livery who stood at the

open door. Anne started ; she had not heard his approach.

"Let him be admitted," she said, and seated herself once more, arranging her draperies so as to give the best possible effect. Her hand strayed to her hair, and she smoothed the little curls that clung about her forehead. Cromwell advanced up the long room.

"Your servant, Lady Anne!" he said, and kissed the hand she extended to him.

"You are late, sir," she reminded him.

"Ay, madam, to my confusion," he said deprecatingly, "but the King's Grace had need of my poor counsel, wherefore I tarried with him ; pray you forgive me."

Anne pouted. "I love not a lukewarm service, sir," she said icily ; "but to business. How fares it with the cause ? My heart is sore for the poor people who are barred from the Scriptures, Master Cromwell, and yet the King is not well affected toward the new learning."

"He will be, madam ; he will be," said the favourite quickly. "You, madam, are the best pledge of that. He will have you, 'Pope or no Pope,' he says."

"Said he so, good Master Cromwell ?"

"Ay, he said so, madam. And the new learning will pave the way, and England and Englishmen will be free of the Pope."

"You go too fast," she said. "The King may

accept the new religion, but Englishmen are ever slow to make such changes—it will take time. But we will hasten matters somewhat.”

“You sent for me?” he reminded her.

“Ay, Master Cromwell, I need your counsel. Be seated, I pray you, for I have much to say to you.” She indicated a chair, as she spoke, on the farther side of the table. He went and sat down; the light was full on his face; hers was in shadow. “The Queen must be dismissed,” she said abruptly.

“How dismissed, madam?”

“That is for you to devise. I can no longer tolerate matters. To have my rival in the same house with myself is irksome.”

“But, as it is her house?” he said pensively.

“She must go——” said Anne with finality. “Had I been in her place, I should have left long since.”

Cromwell looked at her admiringly :

“I should scarcely dare to say as much to the King,” he objected.

“Then *I will*, Master Cromwell. The King is my very good lord, and is ever pleased to serve me. I but wished to give you an opportunity to prove your devotion. You fear the King?” she laughed.

“Surely, madam; God and the King,” he said, and rolled his eyes upward.

Anne laughed again.

"You misjudge him, man ; you should *love* God and the King."

"Nay, but I leave that to you, madam."

"Enough !" she said sharply. "To business ! There is a friar—Forrest of Greenwich—he must be removed. You understand ? It must not seem to be our doing ; it must be done legally."

Cromwell looked up again, his face had become stern. "I wot the man you speak of," he said, "yet the people will have to be persuaded, for they love the friars."

"Do nothing hastily ; we must bide our time : he laughs best who laughs last. Surely 'twill be an easy affair to ensnare him in his speech—on this very question of the King's secret matter, for instance ?"

Cromwell thought for an instant. "These friars be subtle in their speech, madam, they take no risks ; it may be long."

"Be it so, but be it sure also. I have another inquiry to make of you : Know you aught of Sir Arthur Ward ?"

"Ay, madam, I know him. A convert to the new learning and zealous for the cause ; yet methinks I trust not too much these student converts—they are interested only in the philosophy of the question—they will scarcely strive to enforce their views. Give me a man with ambitions ! He may be as wicked as Satan, but I'll warrant you he'll make his mark."

"So—Sir Arthur Ward is not ambitious?" asked Anne carelessly.

"'Tis but a poor plodding student, with a long head and no heart for fighting," answered Cromwell.

"Then he will be no tool for our service," sighed the lady.

"Tool!—Sir Arthur Ward a tool! Marry! Lady Anne, 'tis plain you know him not."

"Well, there are others," she said, as if weary of the subject.

"Ay, there are others, and to our hand," he said.

"What mean you?" she ejaculated. "Master Cromwell, trifle not with me. I am but a poor lady, with not many friends. I cannot reward you as I would."

"Nay, lady, I spoke not of reward. 'Tis ever my pleasure to assist beauty in distress; how much more so when I know that beauty is the King's friend?"

"You flatter me! poor me!" she exclaimed. "But tell me of your tool."

"Our tool, madam," he corrected.

She flushed a little angrily. "And you a man!" she said—"your tool."

He frowned. "Nay, 'twere best to be plain spoken; we are partners in this business."

She half rose angrily. "I am no partner with you, Master Cromwell, nor ever was. There are others will not so presume."



He had risen at her outburst. "Nay, lady," he said soothingly, "you mistake me. Let it be said as you direct; we understand each other?"

She inclined her head. "Tell me of your tool," she repeated, and settled herself again in her chair.

He resumed his seat. "I have a letter from one, Robert Lyst, a lay brother at Greenwich. He applies to me for advice, alleging that the rule is over strict for his inclination, and that the warden is too severe. He says that he was of old my lord Cardinal's servant, and later a poor student of Oxford; that he met one of the Greenwich friars when he was on pilgrimage to some place in Wales, and that it was he who persuaded him to enter their convent at Greenwich."

"Will he serve the purpose?" she asked eagerly. "He may be tired of the Observants and yet not willing to do your work."

"The very man, madam, or I am no judge of faces. A fresh fair face, youthful in appearance for his years, with just that hint of delicacy and weakness about the mouth and chin that mark unsteadiness of purpose, cowardice even, it may be; and depth of eye that might indicate either saint or fiend."

"You have observed him well, Master Cromwell. And this most excellent tool—you have approached him?"

"Lady, I am no clumsy dealer with men, who would fright them before he has made sure of

them. I but advised him gently, as for his soul's sake, and bid him wait a while prayerfully. I told him that it might be that he was destined for something higher than a mere lay brother ; that if he liked not his present life after a further trial, I would advise with him further concerning his trouble. No, lady ! Thomas Cromwell builds to last. 'Twere idle to fright the duck that is to be our decoy."

"Yet time presses. I would that this affair might be settled soon."

"Then you bid me not to use this Robert Lyst, madam?"

"Nay, use him, sir—use him ; but let me not see him, for I cannot bear snakes," she cried.

Cromwell smiled, a weird, inscrutable smile.

"Your wishes shall be respected, madam," he said quietly, and rose as if to take his leave.

"What of the Friar Forrest?" she asked him quickly.

"He has incurred your displeasure?" he inquired.

"I told you so——" she replied.

"Nay, then, I am sorry for the poor wight."

Anne frowned.

"A truce to your pleasantries, sir. I will tell you an I needs must : I met him one day at Greenwich, and he was pleased to prophesy evil for me."

"And if the prophet be removed his word will

not be accomplished?" he asked, and there was a trace of mockery in his tone; yet his face was stern, and she wondered if she had heard aright.

"'Twill prove that I care naught for his idle threats," she said, drawing herself up proudly.

"Nay, madam, 'twill more likely seem that you feared them."

"Another man had not dared," she said passionately, and stamped her velvet-shod foot on the stool before her.

"Another man had not been so honestly your friend, madam. There will come a day when the crown will press heavily on your brow, and you will do well to look to your honest friends then."

"Press heavily? Nay, sir, I have no crown as yet. Let me but wear it; I shall not complain of its weight."

"May your words come true, madam. If I can aid your cause, you may depend on me to further it; and if you need a friend, remember Thomas Cromwell." Anne offered him her hand; he knelt and kissed it. "My queen," he murmured gallantly. Anne flushed with triumph—she had gained a friend!—A friend? or a broken reed?

\* \* \* \* \*

## CHAPTER IX

“MY RIVAL!”

THE Lady Anne rode on a little in advance of her attendants with a pensive air and downcast eyes. She was robed in a green satin riding dress, with rich gold trimmings, and wore a plumed cap of dark velvet of the same colour strewn with pearls. She sat her palfrey easily, and to the eyes of Henry, who rode to join her, she looked every inch a Queen.

There were those who looked askance at the fair woman and said that she played a part, but those were the gossips and scandal-mongers of the Court, who were fain to impugn intentions where they did not dare to blame actions that were only too like their own. Certes the Lady Anne seemed a model of discretion on that fair summer day, and the ruthless tongues were silent, though shoulders shrugged, or eyelids lifted quizzically, yet at the same time carefully, so that the King should not see.

The park was at its best. The trees were in

full leaf, the grass green and lawn-like, and the copses pleasantly cool. The King addressed the Lady Anne. She affected to start.

"Your Grace stole upon me unaware," she said. "I knew not that you had left the Council."

"Ay," he said, throwing the reins on his horse's neck and dismounting that he might walk by her side. "Ay, I have done with them for the day, sweetheart. Come, dismiss these people and rest with me a while in this glade; 'tis a perfect day, and riding is warm work in the sun." She looked down upon him as he walked beside her with a hand upon her rein. He jerked it suddenly and the palfrey stumbled.

"Be not affrighted," he said; "'twas but a snake in the grass."

"A snake!" she echoed, and shuddered. "I like not snakes."

"It is gone," he replied. Then, raising his voice: "Ride on all! The Lady Anne and I will rest here." He held her stirrup as she alighted, and caught her slender form as she sprang to the ground. "Lead away the horse," he commanded. The eyebrows were more decidedly raised as soon as the attendants' backs were turned to the royal lovers, though the tongues were perforce silent until they were out of earshot of the King.

Anne seated herself on the stump of a tree that had fallen under the axe of the woodsman.

"So! you are well throned," said Henry, and

raised her hand to his lips playfully. She smiled at him.

"I would——" she said, and paused.

"Well?" he replied. "What would you, sweetheart?"

"I but proposed to ask a favour of your Grace," she said. Her voice rang unsteadily and the King looked at her intently.

"A favour, Anne? Nay, if that be all 'tis yours before you ask it. Now tell me," he said, throwing himself lover fashion at her feet. Anne flushed.

"Nay then, 'tis but a foolish wish, but I proposed to ask your Grace to send me the Lady Alison Ward to be my lady. I—I have knowledge of her father, that he is a most excellent man and a great scholar," she added, to give point to her request.

Henry drew in his lips sharply. "It was yourself who recommended that she be made a spy upon the Queen," he objected. "Have you so soon forgot, my Lady Anne? Or have you proved her other than you thought?"

"Nay, my Liege, I know no more of her now than I did then, but I have compassion for her youth and inexperience. In truth she loves the Queen well, and I was loath to take the bloom from her fidelity with over-rough handling—and I had a plan for her too."

"So!" laughed Henry, "you would marry her to

one of your Court gallants? Fie! fie! sweetheart ; 'twere better far to suffer them to manage their own affairs, seeing that they cannot hinder ours.”

“Nay, Henry, do not misunderstand me. Or is it that you merely try me to see what I will say? I know not—I would marry the lady to some wise student.”

“His name?”

“Nay, that I know not certainly—but—I have thought of Roger Ascham, a worthy man and learned to boot.”

“And wherefore?”

“For my pleasure, your Grace.”

“For your pleasure—nay, you are as perplexing as the rest of your sex, sweetheart.”

“It is my pleasure to do that much favour to Roger Ascham—but if your Grace disapproves——”

“I did not speak of disapproval; I did but marvel at your goodness, sweetheart, that takes its pleasure in planning happiness for all the world, and oftentimes neglects your own.”

“How neglects?——” she said, turning her dark eyes full upon him.

“You know what I would of you, sweetheart,” he said; “you are at one with me, and yet you hold aloof.”

“Nay then, my dear Liege, my happiness is to do your bidding, yet when I look up to the height of my ambition it dazes me.”

"Does the prospect dazzle you?" he answered, taking her hand and holding it firmly clasped in both of his. "I would circle that slender finger with my lover's sign of gold, and," toying with the little curls that escaped from her cap, "I would make these prisoners with a crown. You are fair, Lady Anne! and queen-like forsooth. I would make you my consort and my Queen."

Her breath came and went tempestuously.

"But I can be neither, my Liege, while this tardy Cardinal holds the question of the divorce so long in hand. Henry, I am tired of this; give me back my freedom. I have no assurance. Let me be an honest woman again, and bid you farewell. Even in France, men looked askance at me—the Queen prayed you to excuse her attendance at the feast—the King spoke to me slightlying as to a person of little worth."

"Patience! patience, Anne. Rome moves but slowly. It shall be done. On my kingly word, it shall be done—and soon. As for the Lady Alison Ward, I will speak to the Queen this very night and request her to cede her attendant to you."

"Ay, there's the sting!" said Anne passionately, "my rival living in the same house with me; eating the same meat, drinking of the same cup. She is always in my path with her long face and strange observances. And I must bend the knee to her forsooth, and call her Queen, I, whom you



were fain to make your Queen! Go to, Henry! I am tired of it. I will go away to some quiet nook where I can forget the world and the weary life at the Court; some little corner where I can forget ambition, and love—*and you!*" She ceased, breathless from haste.

The King had recoiled at her first outburst, more dismayed than angry, for Anne had but put his own thoughts into words. For a moment he turned from her, and his face grew red and pale by turns, for the passion of his desire shook him while the sting of her anger urged him to his resolution. A sob half strangled her, and he turned to her again.

"Sweetheart!" he cried, and passed his arm about her, for she was swaying with the violence of her emotion.

With a pathetic gesture of surrender she hid her face on his broad shoulder.

"Forgive me, Henry," she said; "I was fretted past bearing. The shafts of venomous speech of evil-minded men rankle in the breast of a defenceless woman."

"I know it, Anne. Yet think, I am powerless. I may love you; I may make you my Queen—my wife even—yet can I not still the slighting tongues of evil men or women. Do you care so much for what the world may say? If I love you, sweetheart, and I do; if you love me, and you have told me so; why need we reckon what

the world thinks? Being evil, it needs must think evil."

She shuddered in his clasp.

"The world has one law for a man and another for a woman," she moaned. "Let me go, Henry; set me free. Suffer me to be happy again, as I used to be."

"How—happy?" he said, tightening his grasp of her—"how, happy, Anne, now that you have learned to love? I swear to you that the world has changed for me since I first looked into your dark eyes and heard you say you loved me. I believed you, Anne; I believe you still. Would you throw my love away as a thing of no value?"

"I could not, an I would, Henry. Fate is too strong for us; it has been too strong for others before us, and will be for others yet to come."

"Too strong for others—yes—but others were not Kings of England, Anne; others had not so much at stake as you. Bethink you what the world would say, you who fear its censure. I can make you an honest woman, sweetheart, and a proud, for I can place you so high as to be above the tide of vulgar tongues."

She wrenched herself free.

"Do you know what the world would say—do you, Henry? The greater world that will come after us? The actions of Princes do not die, they have to face history and the judgment

of posterity. Do you know what they will call me? Is it nothing to you to hear the woman you love called a——”

He clapped his hand over her mouth.

“Nay—you shall not say the word, sweetheart; it suits not your lips. Come, let me kiss away that frown and wipe the tears from your eyes.” He took her in his arms again, and soothed her with loving words.

“Nay, sweetheart, be not so sore distressed. The Cardinal shall see to it that the question of the divorce is settled forthwith.”

Her frame shook with sobs, so that she could not answer him, and he waited.

“Forgive me, Henry,” she faltered when the violence of her weeping was a little past—“forgive me. Of a truth I am overwrought between my desires and my fears—between the will to do your behest and the dread to obey.”

“Ay,” he said tenderly. “Ay, sweetheart, my love; my queen—my wife!”

She trembled at the word, and raised her face to his. “Your wife, Henry, or nothing,” she said firmly.

“Be it so, sweetheart,” he said, and kissed her.

Together, when she had removed the traces of her recent agitation, they strolled through the park, until they reached the terrace before the castle. There she left him and went to her own apartments.

He watched her disappear, and then fell to pacing the terrace restlessly with a perplexed frown on his brow. A door opened, and the Duke of Richmond advanced.

"The Cardinal would speak with your Grace," he said.

"Ha! the Cardinal, said you, Hal? I'll bring the butcher's dog to time, or know the reason why!" he exclaimed. "Bid him attend me in my closet in an hour's time, and, hark you, Hal, go to the Queen and tell her it is my will that she should leave the castle with all despatch. I go away this afternoon and must find her gone on my return."

The boy looked puzzled. "The Queen?" he said.

"Ay, boy, the Queen! Bid her depart with all speed—and tell her, too, that the Lady Alison Ward remains. I have advanced her to attend upon the Lady Anne."

\* \* \* \* \*

## CHAPTER X

### THE FALLEN STANDARD

THE Queen was seated with her ladies. While others plied busy needles at the embroidery Alison read aloud. She stopped suddenly, and the ladies looked at her, and then beyond her to the Duke of Richmond, who stood bowing to the Queen in the doorway. Alison rose and went to him.

"I would have private speech with her Grace," he said. "I am the bearer of a message from the King."

"Come in, sir, come in," answered the Queen; "there be nothing so secret that I cannot tell it to these friends of mine."

The boy hesitated. "The King's word is for your Grace's ear alone," he protested.

Katharine smiled. "Well, then, come nearer, sir. I pray you continue to read," she said to Alison. The heads were bent once more over the embroidery frames, but anxious looks were directed by more than one pair of eyes to their beloved Queen, who was seated in earnest conversation with the King's messenger. Alison ceased reading with a sense of something wrong,

she could not have told how or why, but when the Queen turned her pale face to them again she knew that in some subtle way she had divined the crisis. For an instant there was an ominous silence, then the Queen spoke.

"Tell the King," she said, and her tones were low and even with intense feeling, "that I do his will as I have ever done. Tell him, too, since he has already gone and I may not tell him so with mine own lips, that, go where I may, I am his wife. He cannot thus take back his troth, break his kingly word, and unqueen her whom God hath crowned his true consort. Tell him that I go in all dutiful obedience to my husband, for whom I pray, and will pray while life shall last."

The Duke bowed. "Your message shall be delivered to the King, madam. There is another matter that hath escaped me."

"Yes, yes!" said the Queen, "let us hear the whole of your mission."

"It touches the Lady Alison Ward," said the Duke.

Alison stepped forward. "Me?" she said.

"You, lady. The King wishes that you go not with her Grace. He has advanced you to the service of the Lady Anne."

"Tell him——" she began impetuously, but the Queen stayed her with a gesture.

"Suffer me to speak," she said, holding out her hand to the girl. Alison threw herself at the

Queen's feet. Katharine bent forward and laid a soothing hand on the girl's dark tresses. "The King's wishes are my law," she said to the boy; "they shall be obeyed."

Alison looked up at her with a strained face almost as white as her own. "I will not go, madam," she said. "I will not be sent from you. I will not serve that——"

"Nay, Lady Alison," said the Queen kindly, "that is no way to serve me. The King's wishes must be respected; as for the lady you are to serve, it may be that she is not so much in fault as you opine. Bethink you, Lady Alison—would you meet evil with evil, or mend an injury with reviling?"

"I cannot leave your Grace," faltered Alison, weeping.

"Nay, child, 'cannot' is a coward's word. You will not leave me, for you will remain behind; it is I shall leave you, Lady Alison."

The girl's tears fell fast, and sobs shook her so that she could not speak.

The Queen bent down to her. "Poor motherless child!" she whispered. "Yet if my own child were so commanded I would counsel obedience. After all, child, it may not be for long. Content you, dry your eyes, and let me look my last upon a smiling face."

Alison looked up with an attempt at obedience. Katharine smiled her approval.

"We shall to our Manor of More after Mass tomorrow," she said. "I pray you, ladies, to make what preparations for departure you may. The King's will is our law and must be obeyed; neither will you murmur, for that which God permits is the best for us—never doubt it."

They crowded round her then with lamentations and commiseration for her grief.

"Peace!" she said at length, "peace, my friends, for my heart is too sore for your loves; your words fall on too tender a spot; they but chafe the wound that naught can heal. Say no more—only pray for me, for indeed I think that I shall not live long. Now leave me, all of you, except the Lady Alison. I have that to say to her that concerns herself alone, and it is the last opportunity," she said, smiling wistfully.

They left her then, stealing away with affrighted eyes as they would have stolen out of a death chamber, with awe upon their faces.

Alison knelt still at the Queen's feet, for she had not ceded her place to any, not even to Donna Maria, Queen Katharine's Spanish lady.

The Queen sat silent for a moment, and her lips moved. Her face was white and drawn, as, indeed, her illness of late had often made it, but there was a look upon it that the girl had never seen there before—the look of one who has heard the summons of another life and would fain obey its voice.



Alison was filled with dread ; she scarcely knew what was passing ; it was as if a spirit had beckoned her to the veil that hangs between life and death and bidden her look athwart its silver meshes at the other world. She comprehended that what seems death to us is life—life full, and rich, and exuberant ; life as we know it not here : the true life of the land beyond. The thought captured her heart and carried it upward, as though it were borne on angel wings to the very gates of heaven ; and then came the swift sweep of returning wings to earth again.

The Queen spoke.

“Lady Alison,” she said softly. The girl raised her head and fixed her eyes on the Queen’s face ; it had softened now to almost maternal tenderness. “Lady Alison, we may not dispute the King’s right to order our affairs ; it is his to command, ours to obey. Listen, child, for the time is short ; you will remain at the castle when I go. Until then you will continue your attendance on me, for the Queen may not be stripped for the adornment of—another lady.” Alison had noted the break in the Queen’s voice and the substitution of a word for one nearly uttered.

“I cannot serve the Lady Anne!” she cried, and leaned against the Queen’s chair, her hands clasped on the arm of it.

“Bethink you, child, is it easy for me, a wife of twenty years, to submit to her? If I can

accept the King's command, is it so impossible for you?"

Alison hung her head. "I will do your bidding, madam," she said, through her sobs.

"There spoke a brave woman!" said the Queen, lightly smoothing the girl's brow with her hand. "It is not easy, child, to give up those we care for—but—I see you are brave now, and will listen to my words. Look at me, Lady Alison, for this is farewell. To-morrow I shall be away; when I am gone, you will wait upon the Lady Anne, and tell her that I sent you to beguile her solitude; and, hark you, child! make a friend of her. Let no unworthy feeling come between you and your duty; look to her in your difficulties—for you will have such—they come to all. Think that in doing this you will please me, and try to be happy in your new attendance. Let me caution you, though I feel sure that you need no such caution from me, to hold aloof from over much friendship with any at the Court, for that way comes trouble; and repine not over much, child, nor show yourself sad or gloomy, 'twould be my undoing, but be yourself, Lady Alison, your gentle, patient, light-hearted self, and spoil not your eyes with weeping—you owe that much to Sir James."

Alison flushed. "I would that I knew where he is, madam," she faltered.

"Nay, child, it is hard to be parted from those

we love, and time alone will tell. But rest satisfied in the assurance that he is honest and true; some time he will come again to claim you. In that day remember Katharine."

The girl looked up shyly. "God save your Grace!" she said heartily, "and let that day bring me again to your service."

The Queen smiled sadly.

"Nay, child, it must come quickly, then—my days are nearly run—not for long shall I have to tread the weary way—not for long——" Her voice died away, and a flush of gladness came into her pale cheeks and shone in her eyes.

The girl watched her face in silence with deep wordless thoughts in her heart.

A sudden stir at the entrance made the Queen look up. A page entered.

"The Lady Anne craves speech of your Grace," he said. Alison started and opened her lips, but remembered the Queen's word, and remained silent.

"Bid her attend me here," answered Katharine, and Alison had never seen her look more queenly.

The girl rose as if to go.

"Nay, Lady Alison, I shall need you. You may withdraw to a little distance so that I can call to you."

The curtains were lifted again, and Anne entered the room—alone. She advanced to the Queen's chair, and made a deep reverence.

"I have been told of your Grace's departure," she said, "and came to say farewell."

The voice was gentle, yet some might have detected a note of triumph in the low sweet tones.

"Nay, Lady Anne, you are welcome, though I scarce expected to see you," rejoined the Queen a trifle stiffly.

Anne looked a little uneasy.

"In truth, I am come to crave a favour from your Grace," she said, and hesitated, for the Queen's eyes rested wonderingly on her face, "anent the Lady Alison Ward," she added hurriedly.

"The Lady Alison Ward has been informed of the King's command, and will remain at the castle, Lady Anne. Till I go hence she will remain in close attendance on me, for I cannot spare her yet. I have counselled her to submission, and I pray you to use her with all kindness, for she hath a tender heart."

Anne bent her head.

"I wish her well, your Grace, I but sought to do her some service for her father's sake, therefore I prayed the King that she might remain with me."

The Queen looked at her reproachfully.

"You do yourself more wrong than you do me, Lady Anne. Bethink you, when the King has tired of you, what will you do then?"

Anne looked at her quickly.

"The King loves me, madam. 'Tis pity that my gain is your loss. Truly I would have had it otherwise, for your sake; but an the King's conscience is uneasy, what may a poor woman do?"

"Nay, an the King's conscience be uneasy, 'twere hard to say," said Katharine meaningly.

"He hath sworn it to me, madam," she returned; "yet, rest assured that I will be the King's wife—or nothing to him. Of that he had my assurance no later than this morning."

Katharine stirred a little, and her hand went to her heart.

"You are ill, madam!" cried Anne solicitously; "suffer me to call your lady."

"'Tis nothing, Lady Anne, but a pain that comes and goes; 'tis past already"—but her face was drawn and haggard, as the face of one sore wounded. "You did well, Lady Anne," she resumed, after a pause—"but you may rest assured that you will never be the King's wife unless—I die. Our marriage was too sure in the face of God and man ever to be revoked or annulled. Bethink you, lady, after twenty years of wedlock, after five children that I have borne him, could such a marriage be dissolved as of no worth? Have I lived the life of a worthless woman, that he should spurn me now—me and mine innocent babes? No, Lady Anne, I have put my trust in God and in our lord the Pope; he will defend my claim to be an honest woman."

and a true wife." She leant back in her chair, trembling with the emotion of her protest.

Anne shrank before the look in her eyes.

"I give you farewell," she said, after a slight pause. "Madam, I would not part from you thus ; in truth mine own heart is torn in twain betwixt the love I have for the King and the duty that I owe myself."

"Lady, you wrong yourself, believe me, when you yield to the King. Might I counsel you ; might I warn you ; might I prove my regard for you, I would urge you to fly, to cast ambition from you, to put the seas between you and your unlawful passion, and to be true to your better self. Methinks you are better than your acts would seem to prove. I believe in my heart that you are not hardened in this way. Why, since perfect love is sacrifice, will you not leave the King for the King's sake and bide your time ? 'Twill not be long, Lady Anne. To one so sore stricken as Katharine of England death comes as a gentle messenger of release ; from one so sick in body as myself it cannot be far away. Wait—wait a while, my Lady Anne—'twill not be long." She leant forward in her seat and laid her hand on Anne's arm.

Anne shook it off quickly.

"I may not turn back," she whispered hoarsely, "hear me, your Grace. I have sworn to wed the King—to *wed* him, mind. Because I love him ?

Well, e'en think as you list about that ; but I love him not well enough to throw away the crown of England for his sake. I would be his wife, that I might be his Queen. I would not be less than his wife, lest I be less than Queen."

Katharine rose slowly, and stood stately and erect, one hand resting on the arm of the chair from which she had risen.

"Beware!" she said sternly — "beware, my Lady Anne. You think to flout me to my face; to abase me that you may shine. You sought me of your own will, I not sending for you, and I have used you with all courtesy. Now, I warn you : my days are nearly run, but think not that you shall long survive me ! The King has cast me aside, who am his wedded wife, the mother of his babes. Think you that he will hold you more surely in his grasp than he has held me ? Think you that he will keep his word to you when he has failed to keep his solemn vow before earth and heaven ? My Lady Anne, I pity you if in truth you so think ; I pity you if you continue in the course you have entered upon. Remember ! *You shall not long survive me, and it may hap that your way to peace will be by a rougher path than mine.* Pray you, for your own sake, repent you and flee while yet there is time. Now leave me, for I am weary and would fain rest——" She stood while Anne turned without a word and left her. Then she called Alison to her. "I am

weary, child, help me to my chamber——” she said. Then, turning suddenly to the girl, she added: “You will speak of this interview to none; in truth, I think the Lady Anne forgot your presence.”

“Your Grace shall be obeyed,” said the girl respectfully, as she helped the Queen to her room.

The following day dawned hot and sultry, with a heavy mist over the river. The trees in the park dropped moisture from their leaves, and the air was motionless. Out of the west came the distant mutterings of thunder. Alison walked on the terrace, she had not slept all night, and the early light had brought her into the open air. She walked listlessly, stopping to cull a flower here and there from the old-fashioned borders; a little thyme, some marjoram, sweet-scented stocks, a fragrant rose, made up her little posy, and she bound it with a ribbon taken from her hair.

“Poor Queen!” she sighed—“poor Queen!” The tears were very near her eyes, but she resolutely forced them back. She had promised the Queen that she would not weep, and she was fain to keep her word. There was a muttering of thunder, and the fluttering of a breeze; Alison looked up anxiously, and put out her hand; a big drop fell upon it like a tear from the greyness above, and the drop was followed by others. She went towards the castle, and a great flash of blinding lightning darted in between her and the



shelter of the door. The storm wind came howling and rushing across the park ; in another moment it had caught the royal standard that flew from the keep, and rent it from the staff with a report like the rattling of musketry, and hurled it far afield amongst the bushes of a shrubbery, where it lay for the elements to work their will upon it. The girl crept into the recess of an archway, keeping as close into its shelter as she could, too terror-stricken to move, yet with a fascinated gaze bent on the fallen and sodden standard that lay not twenty yards from her. The thought that she guarded it, sentinel-like, held her spellbound, until the worst of the storm had passed, but the rain had not ceased when she emerged from her shelter and went to raise it.

The great flag was heavy with the rain that had fallen upon it, and it taxed her energies to extricate it from the bushes amongst which it had fallen. She succeeded in time, and wrung the water from it as best she could, folding it and carrying it in her arms.

The storm had roused everyone in the castle. Already the Queen was dressed and asking for Alison. She came, all drenched with the rain, but holding still her rescued standard and the posy that she had gathered. To the Queen she told the story of the storm.

“Alas! poor standard,” said Katharine, “torn

down in the very day of my exile. With you lies low the honour of England's Queen. Go, child," she added, turning to Alison, "you are wet ; go, change, and come to me again. I thank you for your flowers ; they shall go with me on the way."

The thunder still rolled in the distance when the Queen set forth. She went soberly, as befitted her sadness and her ill-health, in a closed litter, with her faithful Spanish attendant, Donna Maria. With her rode two other ladies, her chaplain, and her apothecary. No guns thundered from the ancient castle, no weapons flashed a salute to her—only the lightning that still played over the hills, and the mutterings of the thunder, marked the passage of Katharine of England from her home and state, and the feverish exultation of the Lady Anne who stood, with Alison by her side, to watch the receding cavalcade from the deep embrasure of a window.

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## CHAPTER XI

### UNDER THE WILLOWS

ROBERT LYST walked slowly by the river. The hot August day was waning, and he had gone to the water's edge seeking relief from the oppressiveness of the sultry air. He walked with bent head like a man lost in thought, his nervous fingers twining themselves in and out of the rosary pendant at his side.

A hasty, almost furtive glance into the willow-clump by the stream revealed a little skiff tied to a stump and a man seated in it apparently waiting for someone. The monk started, an expression of fear passed over his face, and he almost drew back, but the man had already caught sight of him through the willow-boughs that swept to the ground and lay in the water.

"Come hither, Brother Lyst. The day has been over warm ; a row upon the river will refresh you."

"Nay, then, Master Cromwell, it grows late ; the Warden will be angered if I stay out now, for it is near the hour of Compline."

"A truce to your objections, Friar; I am here on the King's business. The Warden must e'en take second place to the King; 'tis written, 'Fear God and honour the King'; I trow the Warden comes third on that count. Have you aught to communicate since last I saw you?"

"Nay, but I am in the same mind as I was then. I cannot rest in this place; the Warden is over severe, and the rule too exacting for my mind. I would that I were free of it all; it is a weary life. In truth, 'twould be another matter if I had taken to it of mine own will, but I was somewhat forced to it by Father Peto. The Warden be a good man I doubt not, yet one with more zeal for the honour of his Order than for the comfort of his friars."

Cromwell nodded. "Ay, that much I have heard of him before—and, so you like not the life? Yet I have heard that it is a goodly house, the observance very strict, the friars all of edifying lives—what more would you, Brother Lyst?"

"'Tis well for those who would live the life. I care not greatly for it. Yet I dread to leave it, for I have no friends."

"Say not so, brother. I am indeed your friend, and I still counsel you patience. It may be that your destiny is to something higher than the calling of a mere lay-brother—it may even be that you are destined to the priesthood. A noble destiny, brother, for a worthy man—and you are

worthy, I think. Content you, then, be patient and all will be well in time. Have you seen the King lately?"

"No, sir. He is at the palace, but he cometh not to the Friary now that the Queen hath left him."

"Ha! cometh not to the Friary? And wherefore?"

"Nay, that I know not surely, Master Cromwell."

"How—surely? You have some reason to think it, or you would not say so much."

The Friar turned to his questioner uneasily.

"Nay, I know not," he said. "But Sunday last the King sent for Father Forrest, and conferred with him long in private."

"And what said he anent the interview? Did he make no report of it to you?"

"None. He but bade us pray for the good estate of the King and for a happy issue to his secret matter."

"And you prayed so?"

Lyst inclined his head.

"We prayed so," he said.

"And for the Lady Katharine? You prayed for her too, I ween?"

The Friar started. "Nay, you know already," he said.

"No. I know not, but I divined that the friars, being the Lady Katharine's friends, would pray for her."

"Ay, that we did," said the brother fervently. "Poor Queen! we prayed for a happy issue to this weary question, and for her good estate."

Cromwell nodded slowly.

"Ay, she is in hard case, poor lady, a sore hard case, for none who know the facts consider her guilty, though 'tis passing sure that she is not, nor ever has been, wife to the King."

Lyst started and his hand went out.

"Nay, you'll throw us into the water, an you have not a care," protested Cromwell.

"Traitor!" gasped the Friar, making a rush at the other's throat that ended in precipitating them both into the stream, which, fortunately for them, was not deep at that point.

"A truce to this foolery!" cried Cromwell fiercely, as he gained the bank and looked ruefully at his dripping garments. But for the life of him he could not resist a smile at the sorry appearance of the Friar in his drenched habit. Lyst saw it, and it angered him still more.

"Nay, you are no true man!" he exclaimed, spitting the water from his mouth, and wringing the skirts of his habit.

Cromwell laughed—a harsh, coarse laugh that startled Lyst.

"Now I have you, Friar," he said; "disobey me and I will have you to Newgate. Others have been sent there for less offences than yours."

Lyst was looking at him with wide-open, horror-struck eyes.

"Nay, good Master Cromwell, I meant no offence," he said weakly. "I but said a word in defence of an injured lady—for such I deem the Queen to be."

"What Queen?" asked Cromwell meaningly.

"Queen Katharine, whom God preserve!" answered the Friar.

"There is no Queen Katharine. Harken, Friar! The Lady Anne is our liege lady; albeit she be not crowned at this present, yet by the grace of God she shall be ere long. To her the King wills that we transfer our allegiance; therefore you have spoken treason this night and stand in danger of the law, you and the friars of Greenwich."

Lyst trembled, his face was ashy pale, and his knees knocked together. "Nay, I meant no wrong," he said. "The Warden bade us pray for the Lady Katharine and for her cause. I know no other Queen. Yet you say that she be not true wife to the King. Sir, it sounds like treason," he said, recovering somewhat from his terror.

Cromwell smiled.

"You are but a simple Friar, Robert Lyst," he said. "Hark you! If you want to escape with a whole skin you must do what I direct."

The Friar looked up at him piteously.

"Let me go, Master Cromwell—let me go.

You could let me go and be away before the storm bursts. I dislike this life; I dislike the Warden; he is too severe, he punishes the friars mercilessly for the least infraction of the rule, and the rule itself is hard—harder than man may keep.”

“You shall go, Robert Lyst—but not yet. You have been in fault, and for your own sake you must repair your error. I need a man like you to do some work for me. Nay, be not suspicious—it is no harm. I have been appointed visitor to the Friary to inquire into the life there, and to discover if all is as it should be. I need witnesses; you shall be one. If there is anything amiss, I shall expect you to tell me. If there is any talk of the King’s secret matter, if the friars speak of it to the King’s dispraise, or to the dispraise of the Lady Anne—whether the discourse be a private one amongst yourselves or a public one in the pulpit of the church—you shall discover that much to me at my request.”

Lyst recoiled from the tempter. “Nay then, you would make of me——”

“A useful means of information,” supplied Cromwell. “’Tis no use calling things by ugly names, Robert Lyst; information is what I am seeking; you shall be the means.”

“And what if I refuse the information?” asked Lyst desperately.

“Nay, then, I have power with the King, but I



could scarce save you from Newgate—and the gallows.”

The Friar shook with terror. “I would depart, Master Cromwell,” he said, hesitating between his fear to refuse and the scarcely less terror of obeying.

“Go, then, Friar!” said Cromwell sternly; “since you will not accept mercy you may expect justice.”

“Justice?”

“Ay, justice, Friar. Newgate—and the pillory—and the gallows!”

Lyst turned to go; his feet almost refused their office, but he could not play traitor.

Cromwell frowned; he had not expected so much resistance from Robert Lyst. “Stay!” he cried, “I did but try you, Friar.”

Lyst turned to him, his face was livid with fear, the hideous spectre that for ever surpasses its cause in horror and suffering. “You—did—but—try—me?” he gasped, and stood, rooted to the spot.

“Ay, Friar, ’tis well to know what men are made of. I was in error; I did not count you so brave a man. I honour you,” he said, extending his hand to Lyst, who grasped it heartily in his relief.

“Nay,” he answered, “I *was* afraid—greatly afraid. To tell truth, I lack bravery.”

“’Tis even braver to dare to do the right in spite of fear, than to so dare, not feeling terror of the consequence,” said Cromwell.

The soft flattery coming on the flood of his revulsion of feeling sank into the lay-brother's soul.

"I will serve you—if I may in honour," he said.

"Then, hark you, Robert Lyst! You are not willing to stay with these friars; you shall leave them. I have proved you and found you worthy to be advanced. I will be your friend, and you shall to Cambridge to prepare for orders. After that preferment will not be difficult to procure, for I have the King's ear and the Archbishop's. But for the present you will remain at the Friary. I am the duly appointed visitor, and you are bound to answer my questions, and to reply truly, so long as you remain a member of this community."

"But——"

"There are no 'buts'; 'tis not a case of honour. You know your rule?"

"Ay, I know my rule."

"Then be content. As long as you remain a friar—*keep your rule.*"

Lyst's face cleared. "It had seemed to me otherwise," he said in a relieved voice; "it is clear to me now, Master Cromwell. Yes. As long as I remain here I will keep the rule."

The Friary bell rang out the hour of compline.

"You had best go now, Friar, or you will get into trouble with the Warden, and it is scarcely worth while, seeing that you will be leaving shortly. I shall be at the Friary next week. Be

discreet—let no man know that I have spoken with you, lest it make it impossible for me to help you. Farewell!”

He stood looking after the brother's retreating form until the screening boughs hid it from his sight.

“I did not expect to find so much of mettle in him,” he said musingly to himself. “I must play the fish warily and I hope to land him successfully. He hath ambition for good, but lacks strength; also, he is more easily approached by promises than by threats. 'Tis somewhat to know your man. I have not lost my time, nor my wetting either,” he added, as he crept shivering to his skiff and took up the oars. “Well, a good pull against the stream will soon overcome the chill.”

He pulled out from the shelter of the willows. The faint sound of chanting came to him sweetly over the water from the open door of the Friary church. A shade of displeasure crossed his brow.

“Chant on! chant on!” he said derisively. “'Twill not be long ere you chant to another tone!”

He bent to the oars with a will, and rowed into the golden haze of the sunset.

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## CHAPTER XII

### THE KING'S GRACE

HENRY paced restlessly back and forth over the grass. He was growing stouter than of yore, and the exercise made him somewhat breathless, for the day was hot and still. Ever and again his eyes wandered to the river and returned thence to the Friary church that nestled amongst the trees over against the palace. An expression of irritation rested on his features as he glanced in its direction.

"A plague upon those friars!" he exclaimed, pausing in his walk to note the ravages that August had made on the trees surrounding the building. "The year grows old; I would that obstinate Friar would but school Katharine to reason. I will send for him; mayhap a gentle word will find a flaw in his armour, for he be a very Michael against the demon of fear. What ho!" he called, raising his voice.

A page came running from his attendance at the gateway. "You called, my Liege?" he said,

doffing his cap and bending the knee to the King.

"Go straightway to the Friary, and bid Father Forrest attend me forthwith," ordered Henry. The boy sped on his mission, bounding across the grass with a long lithe step that aroused the King's admiration. Henry watched him with a smile: "'Tis pity!" he exclaimed, and the smile faded, giving place to an ominous frown, "other men have sons to call by their names, to share their worship, to come after them. Other houses have heirs—but on the royal house of England hath fallen a blight. By the Mass! I will have no more dallying; the divorce must be proclaimed, and with all speed, else the King of England shall have sons and no heirs." He turned hastily and entered the palace, giving orders at the gate that Forrest was to be sent to him at once in his private closet. He passed to his own apartments. Every step added to his annoyance. In this corner he had sat with the Queen when the Emperor had visited them; in that room he had held his daughter on his knee while Katharine had sat, a happy, smiling mother, at his side. That room had been the Queen's. He opened the door and looked inside; there was a musty smell of disuse; his feet touched something; he stooped and picked up a little book of prayers. It stung him, and he flung it hastily on a couch and walked to the casement. From it he could

see the Friary church, and he remembered that Katharine had selected that room for her own because of that very view.

"'Tis all that she is fit for," he said to himself, but a feeling of reverence for his persecuted wife pursued him, and half-unconsciously he doffed his cap and stood bareheaded, for the room exhaled a subtle fragrance of virtue. "I will be gentle with the old man for her sake," he said to himself, and seated himself where he could watch the Friary church. He had not long to wait; in a very few moments he saw a door open and his page come forth, followed by the Friar. He rose and went to his own room, first closing the Queen's door gently as one closes a door on one's beloved dead. He was seated at his table when Forrest entered.

"You sent for me, my Liege?" he said mildly.

"Ay, sit down, Father Forrest," said the King, and the Friar was startled by the mildness of his tone. Supposing he was in a repentant mood, with what joy would he not welcome the royal prodigal! Something of his thoughts shone in his eyes; Henry saw it, and he experienced another shock like that which he had suffered in the Queen's room. For a moment there was a great stillness. Afterward, Father Forrest remembered that he had heard the splash of oars on the river below the open casement, but then he heeded it not.

The King spoke at last. "Father Forrest, our secret matter presses on our conscience," he said sadly, as one overpowered with sorrow.

"Tell me, my Liege, if so you can find rest," answered the old man.

"Nay, I fear me you will never consent to aid me in this matter, Father."

The Priest looked up anxiously. "I do not understand," he faltered. "I thought that perhaps you had changed."

Henry turned quickly. "Changed? and wherefore, Father Forrest? Nay, it seemeth to me only the more certain the longer the question vexeth me, that the Queen is not, and never has been, true wife to me."

"Yet I myself was present at your marriage, my Liege. With mine own eyes I did see; with mine own ears I did hear the marriage. It was right nobly done in the sight of God and man, with Mass and Housel as becometh the wedding of a Christian Prince."

"Ay, but the dispensation, Friar! Could any man, could even our lord the Pope, give such dispensation that a man might take to wife his brother's widow?"

"Nay, my Liege, I am no great theologian. Has not the Pope himself maintained both his dispensation and his power to grant it? The question was fairly put, I ween. The Lady Katharine is a devout Princess, one not likely to err in such a

grave matter, for her own sake, for yours, or for her sons to be."

"She erred not willingly, Father. Ever she hath lived gentle and unrepining, most saint-like and most calm. I was in her chamber but now, and the holiness of the place soothed me like a sanctuary. The Lady Katharine hath ever been a devoted wife, a noble Queen, an unblemished woman ; nay, so great a love as I have for her is but seldom given by man to woman. Pray you, Father, give me your ear, for indeed it is a hard case for a man, and that man a King, to have no heir, nor hope of any, to know not for certain if he be married or unmarried."

The Friar smiled. "Nay then, an 'twill ease your Grace's conscience, I will swear that you are married, as I saw it done. The Queen, most excellent lady, was a bride that any man might have been proud to win, for beauty, wit, and virtue are seldom so intertwined as in the Lady Katharine."

"Go to, Father—go to ! You but increase my uneasiness. I would you could give me some salve for my sore heart—some balm for my conscience that pricks and burns with fear to have done wrong, to have wronged so sweet a lady, to have made her less than wife."

"Nay, my Liege, the Lady Katharine is your true wife ; doubt it not. Believe not that you have done this wrong, be comforted, for indeed you have not so. 'Tis but a wile of the enemy



to destroy your peace, and for happiness to grant you misery." He leaned toward the King as he spoke.

Henry looked up, and the mild gentleness of the old man's eyes pierced him like swords. "Father, your words are too good to be believed. His lordship of Tarbes hath impugned the legitimacy of our daughter. My father's heart was wrung at the Bishop's word. I fear me he spoke truly—I fear me——"

Father Forrest rose, and his tall frame towered above the King, majestic and mysterious: "By the Gospel, my Liege, I make oath and say that this thing is not true. By the Holy Gospels, I swear that the Lady Katharine is your true wife and Queen, whom Heaven preserve!"

Henry looked up at him half terror-stricken. He had thought to betray Forrest into some expression of distrust of his marriage, and this was the result of his efforts. The old man had risen intrepidly, and had not alone affirmed, but actually sworn to his belief in the validity of the marriage of which he had been an eye-witness. But it did not suit the King's purpose just then to allow the Friar to see his anger.

"'Twere too good," he repeated dejectedly. "Father, indeed, you speak as I desire; I would that I could think you right. The Lady Katharine hath ever been to me most sweet and loving; she is besides of a most devout life, as you have

cause to know—and now she pines away from me, for I sent her from me. She is most noble, and I greatly fear that the Emperor will ill brook her dismissal from the Court. I had a plan : she hath ever been desirous of your ghostly help and counsel ; I would that you would go to her and advise with her for her good.”

“ You asked me that before, my Liege. I may not so debase my priestly office. Of a surety I would advise with her for her good, but I could not counsel her to admit that she was less than wife and Queen, on pain of peril to mine own soul. Bethink, your Grace, life is but a little space after all, for Princes as for subjects. And after life comes LIFE for those who have known how to conquer death. O my dear Liege !” pleaded the old man, sinking on his knees, “ for the sake of that life, for the sake of your soul’s salvation, forbear ! Take back the Queen, and the blessing of God will rest upon you ; repudiate her now, in the hour of her suffering and weakness, and you will most bitterly repent—it may be when repentance is unavailing.”

“ Enough, Father Forrest ! I should have a heart of stone to resist such pleadings, and mine heart is traitor to my conscience. I pray you, peace, and pray for me—for us,” he added as an afterthought.

Forrest rose to his feet with a sigh. He had scarcely expected so much patience from the King,

and had come to the interview with his soul prepared for struggle, for prison even or death itself. But he was not deceived, he knew that the evil day had not gone by, that it was but deferred for a little space.

Henry sat moodily tapping the table with his fingers, while the old man stood silently before him with his hands hidden in his sleeves. He recalled the time when he had spoken with the King before on the same theme, in the same place ; he remembered how terror had weighed him down then, and he marvelled at his present peace of soul.

It was long before the King spoke. When he did it was so mildly that the Friar scarcely dared believe it was the passionate man whom he knew who was speaking. "Farewell, Father!" he said, looking up sadly into the old man's face. "I see that you are unwilling to take part against me. For your love I thank you, yet I am not deceived. You cannot bear to separate us, is it not so? And so you see the thing amiss. I will try to see it with your eyes—to put away the dread and terror from my mind, and if I fail I will send for you again. Leave me now, Father, I would be alone."

"Farewell, my Liege! God direct and guard you!" answered the Priest, kneeling for an instant to kiss the hand that the King extended to him. He glanced upward suddenly ; surely that was not

the face of the man who had been speaking with him? Out of the erstwhile sorrow-laden eyes, whose pathos had pierced his very soul, two demons looked, and in their looks he read rage and disappointment and revenge. It was but for an instant, for ere he ceased to look the King's eyes rested sadly on his face again.

"Farewell, Father," he said again, "and forget not to pray for me."

"I will pray for your Grace while life lasts!" exclaimed the old man as he turned slowly away.

"A plague upon his obstinacy!" said the King irritably as soon as the Friar was out of earshot. "I have a mind to have him to the Tower, yet 'twere ill advised to proceed too hastily, for the man is right. Rome has not spoken, my Lady Katharine maintains her rights, the Emperor is like to resent the divorce, and all is at sixes and sevens, while Anne waits—she will do nothing less than wed me, and she is right too."

He rose and walked to and fro impatiently, throwing back his head from time to time like a lion, imprisoned in a narrow den, that feigns to roar. He pulled a miniature from his doublet and looked at it critically. "'Tis a sweet face, yet there is a thought too much ambition. I warrant me she'll queen it finely! And, after all, 'tis well, for ambition will be her surest safeguard—she hath an inclination to dalliance that her pride will hold in check. Fair be your course, lady, and

prosperous. An you bring me an heir I shall be content." He raised the picture to his lips, and with another long look at the portrait he thrust it into his doublet again.

The day was waning when he picked up his cap and went out into the park. The Lady Anne, with her attendants, was walking under the trees. She smiled an invitation to him, and he joined her.

"Truly 'tis a simple friar!" he said. "I could have laughed when I should have wept, to see him so full of tender sympathy for a sorry soul. In sooth I told him a tale so doleful that 'twould sure have moved a heart of stone. I was consumed with sorrow for myself, yet he was adamant."

"I like him not, my Liege!" said Anne, frowning. "He is obstinate, and will damage our cause with the people. 'Twould be safer to send him to Newgate; a prisoner's words lose weight; his pulpit is in ill repute."

"Spoken like a statesman, Anne! You were designed for royalty, sweetheart."

"Nay, I know not," she said, toying with a jewel that hung at her girdle.

"'Tis not my policy to seem to press the Friar for an answer according to my mind. 'Twere better far for the opinion to seem to come from him and unsolicited. I have hopes that Master Cromwell will be able to solve this problem, for come what will I must get these friars on our side. The

people follow them blindly and take their word as law ; 'twill take time, but 'twill be time well spent."

"Time presses, my dear Liege ; the divorce *must* be pronounced soon."

"I have not forgot, Anne, but too much haste oft spoils the plot, sweetheart."

"In sooth, Henry, I wish you could see this matter otherwise. The Pope is but a man after all. Why not refuse to bow to his will in this ?"

"A dangerous word, Lady Anne, for failing the Pontiff's word the world might challenge our marriage."

"If I were King I'd have no such scruples. I would make my own laws, marry whom I chose, divorce whom I chose, imprison whom I chose !"

"You would be a most delectable autocrat, sweetheart," laughed the King. "And would you marry me, divorce me, or imprison me ?"

She smiled at his pleasantry. "I would marry *you*, divorce *Katharine*, and imprison *Forrest*," she said.

"So, you know well what you would do, fair tyrant !"

"I know what I would have you do, my Liege," she returned with spirit. "I would have you throw off this mask and have done with the Cardinal. In sooth, I have no more patience with his Eminence of York. And for the Legate—what is he but the mouthpiece of the Pope ?"

The King smiled. "By my troth!" he exclaimed, "you have a most clear understanding of affairs, sweetheart, and would make a statesman or an ambassador; yet our policy demands that we wait until we force our enemies to put themselves in the wrong."

"You can do so as it is, Henry."

"How so, sweetheart?"

"By taking matters into your own hands. There are Cromwell and the Archbishop ready to serve your Grace. I trow a hint of your will would set them at the affair."

Henry looked at her admiringly. "Nay," he said, "I leave it to you to open the business."

Anne frowned. "An you care not greatly about the matter, let it remain as it is. I did but wish to do your will."

"By the Mass! Anne, you have me there; you are not to be blamed. But have patience, sweet lady; an the divorce be not proclaimed, I will e'en marry you without, for in the court of mine own conscience I have examined this matter and hold myself to be free. Mine own conscience doth acquit me of my marriage with Katharine—are you content?"

She drew away from him a little. "Nay, I know not, my dear Liege; I am but an ignorant woman—how may I judge when learned prelates dispute and are sore vexed?"

"You fear me, Anne?" he asked gently.

"Nay, I fear no man ; but I fear God and would do no evil."

"You are hard to please, sweetheart."

"A woman has but her fair fame. I have perilled much for you, Henry. I have left my home to be near you, and if you marry me not, truly I am undone."

"Tut, tut! sweetheart, who said otherwise? Did I not say that I would marry you, divorce or no divorce?"

"With the divorce, Henry, or not at all."

"I see not that it so greatly matters," protested the King, "seeing that we will have the divorce willy nilly ; but no more now, Lady Anne, I give you farewell, for I have a Council meeting in the morning, and before then there are despatches from the Emperor and the Pope that I must read and set in order."

Anne swept him a long, low curtsey with sylph-like grace. "Farewell, my dear Liege," she said, "and good-night! for I shall sup in mine own apartments."

The King winced, but he was not in a yielding mood, and with a parting salutation that was scarcely lover-like he re-entered the palace.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### THE KING'S THREAT

At the hour of noon a page bearing a silver dish wrapped in a fair white linen cloth rang the bell at the Friary and waited. From the distance came the sound of chanting. A brother came to the wicket and looked forth.

"From the King," said the page. With a clatter of keys the brother porter threw open the gate and admitted the boy into the courtyard.

"Enter, in the King's name," he said courteously. "Whom do you seek?"

"Father Forrest, brother. I have a message for him from the King that brooks no delay—bid him not tarry."

The brother hurried away, and the boy threw himself on a stone bench against the gate to wait.

It was quiet and cool in the shadow of the great gateway, and the youth was flushed with running. The heat had made him drowsy and his head fell forward.

Friar Forrest smiled as he came swiftly to the

gate. The brother porter had bidden him hasten lest the King might have further cause for displeasure with the friars, for it was known that he was already angered with them, on account of their attitude toward the Lady Anne, and their vigorous opposition to the divorce. The clatter of the Friar's sandals on the stones roused the boy, and he sprang up hastily and, as he saw Forrest, doffed his cap.

"God save your Reverence!" he said. "The King sends you this dish from his own table, and bids you not to forget to pray for his good estate."

Forrest smiled. "Nay then, I thank you, good master page. Pray you tell the King that I thank him for his charity, and that we shall not fail to fulfil his behest."

The page bowed. "The dish is for the poor when you have taken the meat," he said.

"In their name I thank his Grace," said the Friar ceremoniously. The boy turned to go. "God bless you, my son," he added. "Farewell!"

"Farewell, reverend Father," answered the boy, and sped across the park to the palace.

The Friar turned to the brother porter. "Give this in alms to the poor at the gate, and bid them pray for the good estate of the King and the Lady Katharine," he said as he walked slowly toward the church.

Vespers were scarcely over when Henry sent

for Forrest. He went at once gently and patiently, expecting no favour, and with his will steeled to resist the King's persuasions. Henry was pacing the terrace restlessly with frowning brows and downcast eyes. He looked up as he heard the rustle of the Friar's rosary, for he had come over the grass and his footfalls were inaudible.

"How now, sir Friar!" exclaimed the tyrant. "You have forgot our clemency all too soon—you throw our favours in our very teeth. Other men would have accepted our gift thankfully and humbly."

"Nay, my Liege, I did so accept it."

"And threw it to the dogs!"

"Nay, I but gave it to your Grace's lieges—to Christ's hungry poor."

"So! you think to defy me to my face! Have a care, Father Forrest. I have been patient with you for that I have respect for your grey hairs and profession—and for the sake of the Lady Katharine, who esteems you. Now, I will give you one more opportunity—the last. Go you to the Lady Katharine with all speed and bid her throw herself upon my clemency. Indeed, I will use her with all gentleness, though she is not, nor ever has been, wife to me. Tell her that I neither blame her for the past, nor shall I permit any man to blame her; that I honour her for her devout life, and—hark you, Friar!—tell her, as if from yourself, that she should take the veil. Tell her that

so she will solve the problem that vexeth me and perils the realm." He looked sternly at Forrest.

The Friar stood silently with downcast eyes until he had finished speaking. Then he glanced up and their eyes met. It was a battle of wills, but the victory was to the Friar.

"My Liege, you have asked that of me that no man may do. I have a soul, and may not peril its salvation. That which you ask of me is deadly sin; a breaking of mine oath, a prostitution of my priestly office. I may not lie to the Queen and tell her that she is not your wife; I may not counsel her to take the veil. I will convey your message to her as coming from yourself, not as mine own counsel. As for the nunnery, the Lady Katharine is not free, though doubtless she would find most peace there if the thing were possible, yet, being wife and Queen, her place is elsewhere."

"So! you continue in your contumacy, Friar! Get you gone! Get you to your Friary, and think not to escape me this time as you did before. I will take means to make you and your friars speak, and with no uncertain voice either, anent this matter. Get you gone! Get you gone!" His face was convulsed with passion.

Forrest bent his head. The storm had broken at last, but it had not found the old man unprepared. Without a word he turned and walked toward the Friary.

"Come back!" roared Henry. "For the sake

of your age and the esteem I have had for you, I will give you one more chance, or I will send you to heaven quickly."

"For your favour much thanks, my Liege," returned the old man quietly. "And for your Grace's threat, 'twere well for an old man to be speeded on his way thither. My life is nearly run, my Liege. I pray you suffer me to depart, for, indeed I dare not do your bidding, being so near to mine own judgment."

The King waved his hand. "Begone, Father Forrest," he said more soberly. "I have supplicated but few men in my time, and you are one of them. I have commanded others, you I have prayed. Begone before I lay my hands on you!"

Forrest bowed. "Farewell, my Liege," he said. "God save and guide your Grace!" He turned away again, and crossed the grassy space that separated the palace from the Friary.

The Friar deemed that he had done with earthly things. His time was short it seemed to him, and he would spend these last hours with his brethren in the shadow of the sanctuary. Friar Peto was crossing the courtyard as he entered the gate and shot the bolt behind him. He raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

"I would speak with you, Father," said Forrest simply. Peto followed him to a little room by the gate where the friars were wont to speak with strangers. Forrest closed the door carefully. "The

King," he said, and his voice trembled with weakness. "The King is angered against us, Father Peto, but against me more than any, for that I cannot do his bidding anent the Lady Katharine."

Father Peto looked uneasy. "I was in fear that it would come to this. 'Twere best to call the chapter together that we may advise with the friars concerning this affair."

Forrest looked troubled. "I fear me that we have some—someone—who speaks not cautiously amongst us," he said in a hesitating manner. "Of late it hath seemed to me that our doings are reported to Master Cromwell."

"'Tis either that, or he guesseth shrewdly," replied Peto. "In sooth, I fear me that I know the source of his information only too well, yet I know not so surely that I dare accuse any man for fear of injustice."

Forrest sighed. "It is ever so—a traitor in the camp; and things reported are ever different from their first utterance. Think you we should let the matter pass?"

"Nay, I think not so, Father Forrest. The rule is to be observed at all costs, and this threatened danger may not come to pass. But tell me of yourself. What said the King?—if I may inquire."

"He bade me begone, because I would not convey a certain message to the Queen and make it seem to be my own advice to her Grace. He was angered because I gave his alms to the poor."

I should have been more cautious, yet how could he have known of it, and so speedily? To make a long tale short, he threatened me that he would send me by a speedy route to heaven."

"And you answered him?"

"That time was short and that judgment was too near for me to peril mine immortal soul."

"You did well, Father Forrest. Yes, we must summon the friars to chapter, and that with all speed."

They stood for a few moments in low, earnest converse, then, as a matter of precaution, they separated, going by different ways to the church, for it was the hour of compline.

The great bell of the Friary clanged loudly and insistently, and the friars looked at each other with startled faces, for it called to chapter. Silent cowed figures filed into the chapter-room, each taking his accustomed place. The last to enter was Robert Lyst, who stole into his seat near the door with a stealthy air, as though he wished not to attract attention.

After the usual prayers had been said, Father Forrest rose to speak. In a quiet voice and low, musical tones he told of his interview with the King, and of its result. He told the substance of the King's message to the unfortunate Queen; of his own reply; of Henry's anger against the friars, but most of all against himself. "For myself, brothers," he said simply, "I am an old

man ; death must come to me soon in any case. In such a cause it would be a sure passport to heaven. Yet mistake me not, the way will be perilous and rough. I know what to expect from man ; but I am assured that God will be my shield and my defence, and I am not afraid. Long ago I fought with the demon of fear and won through to peace, by the favour of God and the prayers of my brethren. To me has come the challenge, and I must e'en take it up, for it has not been of my seeking. It is for you, my brothers, that my heart is sore, for on you will fall the burden of my disgrace. As for me, when the summons comes it will find me ready to obey, yet I should go with a better heart did I but know that you were safe. It was therefore that we deemed it best to call you together, that you might agree concerning some plan, for, doubt it not, the King has decreed that the Friary shall yield or fall." He stepped from his seat and, going forward, knelt in the middle of the long room.

Meantime none of them observed a face peering down intently through a broken pane in the ivy-cased tracery of the great window over the Father Warden's stall.

"For the part I have borne in your misfortunes I pray your forgiveness ; for all my weaknesses and errors I crave your indulgence and your prayers." So spake the Friar humbly, and a great sob broke from his assembled brethren.



Father Peto arose. "Nay, there is naught to forgive, Father!" he said brokenly, and he led him to his seat again.

There was a little stir among the friars, and Father Peto looked anxiously toward the door, but none spoke, and he rose to address them: "It needs not for me to say, my brothers, that we are at one with Father Forrest in this. In all that he hath said or done he hath acted with prudence and judgment—we would have done the same ourselves, God helping us, as he has done. If any brother can think of a plan by which this present danger may be averted from the community, without violating our conscience, he is at liberty to speak."

There was silence. "Hath no one anything to say anent this matter?" he asked, and looked round at the rows of set faces.

His eyes caught an appeal in those of the brother porter. "Speak, brother, and speak freely," he said mildly.

Robert Lyst got on his feet. "Nay, I have naught to urge," he said, "unless it might be that we act with all prudence and caution in this matter, not giving opinions on the question, or so stating them that they be not easily understood."

A little murmur of disapprobation came from the friars, and Peto spoke again:

"We do not seek danger, Brother Lyst, but when we are face to face with it we would act

like men. If the Queen's honour is attacked, who will defend her, if not we who have experienced her beneficence? Would you suffer your benefactress' fair fame to be assailed? Would you see her stripped of everything she holds dear, and then deny her the names of wife and Queen?"

Lyst shrugged his shoulders slightly. "An the King's grace *do* these things," he said, "we must e'en *see them done*, for a friar may not contradict a King, nor a priest override his judgments."

"But we both can and must bear witness for the Queen," said Peto sternly; "three of us, if not more, were witnesses of her marriage with the King in our own church of Greenwich. Three at least were present at the Mass, and saw and heard the marriage. None can speak so absolutely as we can, for we were eye-witnesses and ear-witnesses; 'twere cowardice beneath contempt to hold our peace at such a juncture."

Lyst spoke again. "I am answered, but not silenced," he said; "I am not willing to run your risks for matters I wot not of. I pray you leave to retire from this Friary, for I have long been desirous of changing this life for some other better suited to me." He sat down with folded arms in his place at the door.

Father Forrest half rose, but seated himself again and looked to Father Peto. The latter rose and spoke.

"'Twas I who brought you hither, Robert

Lyst," he said. "You speak truly, you are not suited for our life. We be simple friars who seek to win our way to heaven not heeding the things of the world. To us the threats of Princes are but light, for our ambitions point not to their favour, but only to the favour of God ; and no man who aspires otherwise is suited to our life, or our life to him. Yet bethink you what you do and for cowardice refuse not the will of God. Leave us now and go to your cell, later I will advise further with you."

"Nay, I go not, unless I go altogether," said Lyst defiantly. A look passed between Forrest and Peto.

"Ask him," said the former.

"Robert Lyst, answer me. It has been known to me for some time past that certain sayings of the chapter have been reported to Master Cromwell. It has been further known to me that it was by one of our friars, not by any outside the Friary. *Are—you—that—friar?*"

"Nay, what would you make of me? Would it serve me to play the traitor, Father Peto? You found me straying in the Welsh mountains and brought me hither. Have I not striven since to attain to regular observance? Have I not prayed with you, fasted with you, lived with you? Have I not been one of you?—and you would make of me a nameless thing—an outcast, good neither for you nor your enemies! Father Peto, I

thought not so of you once—I will not think it now.” His voice had risen, and in the heat of his passion he flung out his arms to the Friar as though he would fling back his imputation into his very teeth.

Father Peto looked at him steadily, unflinchingly. “Nay; I would make nothing of you that you have not made of yourself,” he said sternly. “To every soul God gives the making of a man and leaves the work for himself to do. You know how you have wrought, Robert Lyst, I know not—I but asked *for information*,” he said meaningly. Lyst looked at him, furtively at first, but intensity came into his eyes as Peto continued to regard him sadly, and his eyes were fixed on the Friar’s face, until the glance became a stare, and with a wild cry he threw up his arms, and fled.

There was a moment of suspense, then they heard the great gate of the Friary clang to—an echo rang through the empty cloisters—then silence! Each friar looked at each, afraid to voice his fear. The silence was broken by Father Forrest:

“Forgive us our trespasses; as we forgive them that trespass against us,” he said, and the friars said solemnly:

“Amen!”

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## CHAPTER XIV

### THE KING'S TOOL

LYST ran toward the river. In his excitement he had taken no thought for future needs, and it was only after he had paced back and forth excitedly for some time that the consideration of them presented itself to his mind, as a question to be immediately answered. He wanted to see Cromwell, and yet he dreaded the inevitable interview, for he had precipitated matters by his unrehearsed speech in the chapter, and he feared lest the King's tool might blame him for forestalling his plans.

His conscience had quivered under Father Peto's accusation, and although he indignantly denied it, it was more out of dread of Cromwell's vengeance than because he expected the friars to believe him. He became conscious of the habit that he wore—and hated it. He would have cast it aside but that he had no other. It had become to him the symbol of treachery and cowardice, and

he loathed himself and his own mean vices and his own ignoble soul.

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The sun had already set, and the purple shadows were creeping up from the west, when his master came.

"So this is the way you obey me!" he cried impatiently. "Did I not bid you hold your peace yet awhile? You have spoilt my plans, and made me a laughing-stock to the friars, and roused the King's anger against me for a blunderer."

"You told him?"

"Ay, I told him of your bungling; he was angered, but he laughed, and said that you were well fooled for that; though spies were useful, he had no use for such."

Lystswayed with the intensity of his passion. "Liar and cheat!" he cried, "and it was for such as you that I have made myself an outcast, for you and——"

Cromwell put his hand over his tool's mouth. "Nay," he said, "say not the word. I would not let men say that I had turned against mine own tool."

Lyst's face went ashen grey. "So that is what you would call me—you, who erstwhile dubbed me worthy man, and sired me to my face, and deemed me fitter for the priesthood than for the cell. Out upon you, man! I was a weak fool, but you were worse, for you tempted me. I was a

traitor, but you were the devil who betrayed me. A lifetime of remorse could not wipe out this record against me—fool that I was!"

Cromwell laughed grimly. "Nay then, be silent an you cannot discourse sensibly, Robert Lyst. I have a purse here, take it—it is the King's gift, you have earned it—I have a mission for you in the morning. In the meantime get you a lodging. I have brought you clothes better suited to your new state," he said, handing him a bag. "Leave this," touching the Friar's habit, "on the brink of the stream. They will think that you have perished and your flight will be assured. To-morrow morning I will see you again. Meet me in Paul's Alley at noon, and I will give you your orders. Farewell!"

He turned away and left Lyst standing under the willows. It was growing dark. He waited till the stars came out, then, kneeling, laid his throbbing brow on the cool earth. His soul was rent in twain between the desire to go back to the Friary, confess his guilt and plead for forgiveness, and the fear that urged him on as a rider urges a worn and jaded steed who hears the wolves howling in his wake. It was past midnight when he rose and tore his habit from him, replacing it with the suit that Cromwell had brought him. With infinite care he folded the habit and laid it softly under a tree, and turned to go.

He came back after a while and smoothed the

folds of the habit again with his hand, turned once more, and faltered. The sound of chanting was wafted to him on the clear night air from the Friary church. He took the habit again and thrust it into the bag he carried, and strode rapidly away in the direction of London.

Before dawn he was in Cheapside and conscious of hunger, though not of fatigue. He remembered the King's purse, and went into the Green Dragon. The house was scarcely astir, and he had to wait. The landlord looked at him suspiciously, and eyed his bag, but the sight of the purse that he carried reassured him, and he hastened to tell his wife to hasten with breakfast, for that it was for a young gallant who travelled on the King's business. Lyst lingered over the meal; he had several hours to while away before noon, and he began to feel weary, but he was afraid to ask for a bed for fear of attracting undesirable attention, and so when he had stayed as long as he dared, he turned into Cheapside again, and so to St. Paul's.

It was the hour of Mass, and he followed the stream of passers by into the Cathedral. There was a group of serving men near the door, and he knelt amongst them, watching the ebb and flow of the worshippers as the different Masses proceeded. The subdued light and the stillness refreshed him, and after a time his head fell forward and he slept. The Masses were all done when he awoke, and the Cathedral was nearly empty, for it was



close upon noon hour. He looked around him a little puzzled, then the meaning of it all came to him like a stab of mortal pain, and he caught his breath in a great sob.

For a second the desire to return to the Friary almost overcame his dread, but as he passed out once more into the light of day fear regained the mastery, and he repaired to the trysting place. The green of the grass and trees reminded him of Greenwich, and he lowered his eyes, not caring to be forced to think of that which he had lost. Cromwell arrived at the same moment as he.

“Good - morrow, and well met,” he cried heartily, grasping the hand of Lyst. “I see you are at our trysting place betimes. How fared you last night?”

“Nay, I know not, Master Cromwell, nor do I greatly care. I walked hither \ but slowly, and have been here since dawn, only pausing for breakfast at a hostelry in Cheapside.”

“And you rested not?”

“A little while only, in the Cathedral.”

“Well, let's to business. It is the King's will that certain of the smaller monasteries and friaries be suppressed—for the correction of abuses. I have already visited them, and made out my report ; I cannot go myself to every one of them, and see to it that the King's orders are carried out ; therefore I shall send you to some of them in my place. Here is a list ; in it you will find the

names of the different superiors, with inventories of the property of each. You are to take a company of soldiers with you, and superintend the execution of the King's will. You will not have to lay your hands on either priests or property—your men will do that when necessary. You will be there to see that all is done legally and in order; that the houses are cleared of their inmates, and the properties forwarded to the King or his agent. You understand?"

"I understand. Is—is—it necessary that I do this?"

"Are you mad, Robert Lyst? It will be the making of you an you do your duty to the King's Grace."

Lyst looked troubled still; Cromwell watched him intently. "Nay then, be not so squeamish, man. 'Tis but for the correction of abuses, and the protection of church property, that will be sent to the larger monasteries or to the cathedrals for use in Divine Worship."

Lyst heaved a great sigh of relief. "I had not understood it so," he said. "When shall I set forth?"

"To-morrow at dawn. You are to meet your men at Cripplegate—till then, farewell!"

"Farewell, Master Cromwell!"

He waited until the King's tool had disappeared in the shadows of the narrow alley before he turned back again into the precincts, and so

through Little Gate to the Green Dragon. He was weary, and demanded supper and a bed. The host served him with alacrity, for he had noted the King's cypher on his guest's purse, and he judged him to be some person of quality travelling incognito.

As soon as Lyst had despatched the meal, his host ushered him to a chamber, and left him to repose. It was still light, and he lay uneasily tossing in the great bed with the crimson velvet hangings that furnished the best bedchamber at the Green Dragon. By degrees fatigue overcame his excitement and he slept, but only to wake from terrifying dreams, in which he saw Forrest hanging from a tree in Greenwich Park, while Queen Katharine and her maids vainly strove to cut him down. He woke with a stifled cry, to find that he had been the sport of a dream, and rose and went to the window, for he dared not risk another dream like that. The air came a little sharply from the river, and he sat by the open casement, his head resting on his arm, until he fell asleep again. He woke at cock crow to the realization of a new day, with new occupations and interests, and hastily attiring himself he descended to the street and so to Cripplegate, where he found his company waiting for him.

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## CHAPTER XV

### THE BIG BELL TOLLS

THE trooping of armed men in the silent cloister, the hurried footfalls of friars, the clang of the big bell, that called only to High Mass or to chapter or tolled for the passing of a brother, fell upon the ears of Father Forrest like as sudden blows from an unseen enemy. An hour ago the friars had gone to their cells, after their evening prayer in the darkening church, with their souls at peace. Now it was war. He had not heard the loud blows on the great gate nor the loud-voiced commands to open "In the King's name!" But the sound of the bell, which had been his monitor from youth upward, roused him with its stern call to duty.

Silently and swiftly he issued from his cell, and hastened to the chapter-room. The cloister was lurid with light shed by flaming torches, and the air was heavy with their acrid smoke. At either end of the passage way was posted a strong guard, and at the door of the chapter-room itself stood a pursuivant, with Cromwell by his side, and two

soldiers behind them, each with a flaming torch in his hand.

The friars seemed to notice none of these things; silently and orderly they filed into their places—the Warden to his canopied chair at the far end of the long room, and the brethren with cowed heads ranged in front of the long stone benches that stretched from his seat to the door. One place alone was vacant, for Robert Lyst had not returned since that evening, scarce a week past yet, when he had flung up his hands before them all in that very place, and had fled in the terror of his soul.

None spoke until the pursuivant, who had advanced to the middle of the room, lifted up his voice and broke the expectant silence.

“In the King’s name!” he prefaced, “Friars Forrest, Elstow, Abell, and Peto, I call upon you to surrender yourselves my prisoners.” He looked up from the parchment that he held in his hand as if waiting for a reply.

“And wherefore?”—it was the Warden’s voice, and the friars fixed anxious eyes on him.

“For that you have taught and instructed the common people that the Lady Katharine is Queen and the King’s true wife, and so set yourselves above the King’s Majesty and the Council,” replied Cromwell briefly.

“Nay then, I asked you, sir pursuivant,” said Forrest, “what would you?”

"That you come hence with me peaceably and with all despatch."

"Whither?"

"The King's Grace hath ordered you to Newgate," replied the man.

"But it is night!" objected Forrest; "suffer us to remain until the morning, then we will be at your disposal."

"That may not be, sir Friar. The King's Grace be well assured that you have the common people by the ears; therefore, you are to go at once—and by water."

"Then we are ready, sir, since it is the King's will." There was a little movement amongst the friars, and in a moment their order was broken as they thronged fearfully about the Warden and his companions. Then, at a word from him, they came on in slow procession, each giving as he passed the kiss of peace to those of their number who were going to prison—it might even be to death.

"Hasten!" cried Cromwell, "a truce to this leave-taking. I cannot wait, for my men will not have patience an I would myself."

Father Forrest turned to the friars for the last time. "Farewell, my brothers!" he said. "God wots that I am innocent of anything against the King's Grace. God bless you all!" he added solemnly, and turned to the doorway. "Come, Father Peto," he said, and they passed together

into the torch-lit cloister, and to the great gate, and to the park beyond, where they were halted.

Cromwell came forth at last, and separated Forrest from his companions. "You go to Newgate!" he said shortly.

"And these?"

"Nay, you are not to know that—they go elsewhere."

Forrest closed his eyes for an instant, and his lips moved—the terror was at his heart again, beating him down, and tempting him to despair or submission. The slow procession set forth, and still the struggle raged in the Friar's soul. He had deemed that the foe was conquered, for since the night of St. Stephen it had fled.

Until the moment of his separation from his companions, though he had clearly seen their danger, his soul had been in peace, but now that he was alone the demon had come back, and he saw and heard nothing of his journey for the raging of the storm within. He scarcely knew when he was taken from the barge and led to Newgate Prison; he was almost unconscious of the details of his reception and confinement there amongst the felons of that noisome place. It was dark when Cromwell delivered him to the gaoler; and took a receipt for him from that worthy; it was dark still when, after the lapse of many hours, he woke from a fitful sleep to hear a man cursing loudly at his side.

"Hush, friend!" he said, "such words will not help you, and they ill become a Christian man."

The felon laughed. "Who be you, that say words like that? I cannot see you, for the light never comes here save only a glimmer at the hour of noon, and that is past now."

"I am a friar of Greenwich, friend," answered Forrest quietly.

"A friar! Oh, oh! a friar! And of Greenwich too! Have you chanced to contradict his Grace? or it may be that you endeavoured to persuade him that a marriage was a marriage. Oh! oh! We be not over nice in this hostelry, but a friar will be a good diversion."

"Nay then, friend, I can scarce divert myself, for of a truth I do fear that I stand in some peril of my life; yet, if there be aught in which I may serve you, pray you command me."

The man sighed. "You cannot serve me in aught, sir," he said; "my life is in peril too—to-morrow I die, unless I have ill-counted the days. The sooner the better, say I, for life in this hole is scarcely sweet, to say the least of it."

The rattle of keys and an approaching footstep silenced them. Forrest shuddered as he heard his name called. "Nay then, Friar, step quickly; we may not keep the lady waiting!" said the gaoler, pushing the Friar before him.

"Where do you conduct me?" asked Forrest suspiciously. The man did not answer, but con-



tinued to force his prisoner before him until they arrived at the entrance to a small cell contrived in the thickness of the wall. He pushed him somewhat roughly inside and left him there, first shooting a heavy bolt on the outside of the door.

The old man looked around him. There was light from a narrow loophole high up in the wall, a bed of clean straw and a single chair. He was thankful for the light and the sweet fresh air after the darkness and filth of the prison below. For an instant he knelt in prayer, but the sound of approaching steps disturbed him, and he rose. Someone shot back the bolt, and admitted a tall figure heavily veiled and draped in black. She said something to the man in a low tone, and the door was closed upon her. Forrest waited for her to speak, his heart beat fast, he thought that he had seen the tall shrouded figure before. Without speaking he drew forward the chair, and motioned to his visitor to seat herself. She sank into it gracefully, and drew her trailing robes about her feet.

"Who are you, lady?" he asked at last, when the silence had become oppressive.

"Nay, you will ask no questions, Father Forrest," she said; "we have not met before to-day—we shall meet no more—unless——" she added significantly.

"Unless what, lady?"

"Unless Friar Forrest consents to aid the King's Grace in the matter of divorce."

Forrest drew himself up stiffly. "Nay, I thought I knew you, lady," he said. "You know my will already ; the King knows it likewise."

"Men change their minds," she suggested.

"Yes," he answered, "and women too——"

"What mean you, Friar?"

"That you will change yours, it may be, some day."

"I care not for the future ; the present is all I know or want."

"Ay," he said, "the present—the future does not belong to us, save inasmuch as we make it in the present."

"You play with me?"

"No, lady. I wait to hear your will. I play not, the affair is too grievous."

"Then I would persuade you to bend to force," she said, and her voice was sweet and low like the murmur of a summer breeze ; "you are powerless to withstand the King. In time you will have to bend to his will ; why not now, and save yourself this useless suffering?"

He laughed lightly. "My father, lady, was a soldier, and died in the King's wars ; shall I, who have borne the cross these long years past, play the coward now?"

"Nay, I understand not—how coward?"

"To yield to force, lady, is cowardice when

yielding is a wrong to a liege lord. Were I to yield to the King's Grace I should be answerable for the King's soul—and that I dare not."

"'Dare not' is a coward's word!"

"Nay, lady. There be courage that dares; and there be courage that dares not dare—there be these two kinds, and methinks the second is oftentimes greater than the first."

She turned from him petulantly. "I might have known it," she said irritably. "Obstinate Friar! Will nothing move you? You know me?"

"Ay, lady, I know you. I would that you had not come; the King's Grace is wont to be angered at the like. Lady, I tremble lest you incur his anger."

She laughed scornfully. "Nay, an you tell him not, he will not know. And, if you tell him, he will not take your word; the men I have paid well to keep my counsel."

"Yet sometimes men have failed to keep their word."

"They will not fail me; they dare not for their own sakes discover what they have done, for 'tis against the King's express orders."

"Is this true?" he asked.

"Ay, 'tis true, Friar. Do this much for me—swear that the Queen's marriage is void; swear that she is neither wife nor Queen—or, swear that you will maintain my right and title to be his Grace's wife and Queen, and you shall go free. I

swear it. Father Forrest, you are an old man ; how will you suffer the rigours of a prison such as this ? The darkness and the felons' company, the cold and hunger. Would you escape all this, would you have honour with the King and with me ? Would you earn preferment, safety, power ? Then yield to my request."

She had stepped nearer to him, and her head was bent toward him so that the perfume of her garments assailed his senses. Her voice, too, was low and musical and alluring. He felt all these things for an instant.

"Jesu !" he breathed, and crossed himself. "I may not, Lady Anne. Indeed, I thank you for your kind thought of an old man. Pray you be good to your own soul."

She bent toward him still. "To show mercy is to be good to mine own soul. I offer you freedom, the King's forgiveness, favour, preferment. I offer you power—will you not accept them at my hands?—it is a royal gift."

"What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?" he asked sternly.

She gave a little cry, and threw out her hands. "You are ungrateful, Father Forrest," she said sadly. "What must I tell the King?"

"That I am his loyal servant, Lady Anne ; that I love the King too well to do him evil."

She turned from him haughtily. "The Lady

Katharine was well schooled," she said sneeringly, and went from him without further word.

The door clanged to, and there was a rasping sound as the heavy bolt was shot into its socket. Forrest fell upon his knees ; he was thankful that the strain was over, though fear crept by his side as before. He remembered his dream that had come to him on the night of St. Stephen, and it comforted him, for the memory brought him an assurance of victory even though the battle was still raging in his soul. It assured him that he was not striving in vain. To-day there was the terror and the pain ; some day, it might even be soon, there would be the victory and the reward. Yet that day was further off than he knew.

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## CHAPTER XVI

### DERFEL GADARN

ROBERT LYST rode at the head of his company. They had visited nine of the smaller monasteries, and had left behind them chaos and destruction. After the first two or three, Cromwell's tool had become hardened to the sight of homeless monks and desecrated churches, and the others had seemed easier to rob, but he had rigidly insisted on sending the spoils to his master, not suffering any of his men to retain even the least object taken from the suppressed houses, and they were beginning to be discontented. For which reason he rode slowly, awaiting an answer to the report that he had sent to Cromwell demanding fresh orders, or a new company in place of the old. Cromwell had laughed at his weakness.

"I will send him to Price," he said, and the returning messenger had brought him new orders to take his old company and join forces with Ellis Price, who was pursuing an active campaign against the religious houses of Wales and the neighbouring counties.

The company was halted for the night by a pleasant stream when the messenger arrived. He rode straight up to Lyst and handed him Cromwell's letter.

"From Master Cromwell, sir!" he said.

"All right!" returned Lyst, "you need not wait," he added, as the man lingered.

"There is a message also."

Lyst looked up from the letter that he was about to open.

"From whom?" he said sharply.

"From the King!"

"Speak up, man; the King's message comes first."

"The King wills that you go to Llanderfel. There is an image and a shrine there very rich in gold, and the offerings of superstitious people. He wills that you go and dismantle the shrine, and send the image to London, to his palace of Bridewell. So shall the common people know that the King is over all, for there have been tales and prophecies concerning this image, and the King's Highness wills that they should be disproved once for all."

Lyst had started when the man named Llanderfel: "Ay, it shall be done, if the shrine may be found," he said.

The man saluted and joined his comrades, who were preparing their evening meal.

Lyst read Cromwell's despatch and his lip curled

—but he was silent—only he folded the letter and put it carefully in his saddle-bag.

“Master Cromwell takes the spoils, yet he be careful not to soil his hands with the work,” he said to himself, and strode angrily along the path they had travelled that afternoon. The coming dark that wrapped the woods in silence sent him back to the little camp. The men had made a fire of brushwood, and were sitting round it, while the trooper whose turn it was, prepared their evening meal. The blazing branches were spanned by a three-legged pot, and the hungry men rested patiently, regaling themselves the while with the fragrant odours that arose from it. Lyst straggled back to the party. He was displeased at the manner of the King’s message entrusted to the memory of one of his men—displeased at, and afraid of, his mission to Llanderfel. He recalled the night of his wanderings in the Welsh mountains, and his meeting with Friar Peto, and he shrank from the peril of executing the King’s command.

The prophecy of Megan recurred to him, and he remembered her words : “I can see the shrine empty and the image thrown down ; but the hand that strikes the saint is accursed ; he shall reap what he sows.” There were other words, but he could not recall them—perhaps because they had seemed not to apply to himself, but to some other. The night was frosty, and he ordered a great fire



to be built, and arranged for a watch to be kept, then, laying his saddle under his head, he wrapped himself in his blanket, and stretched himself on the ground under the shelter of some bushes, and slept. The tramp of horses awoke him, and he sprang to his feet; the men were already aroused and on the alert.

"To horse!" he shouted. Every man sprang to the saddle, and waited with a hand on his weapon. Along the western road came a company of horsemen, riding singly in a long line, that crept steadily nearer. Behind them in the distance rose the hills dim and blue, until the coming of the frosty sun touched them with a crimson glow that turned them to purple. The advancing company was still at a considerable distance, but in the clear air the fall of the horses' hoofs rang out with a merry sound as the travellers came on. Lyst watched them with a tremor of anxiety.

A trooper called to him that all was well—it was the man who had brought the King's message—and passed quickly to his leader's side.

"'Tis Ellis Price, sir," he said, and Lyst breathed scarcely more easily—he was no soldier, and dreaded a fight before all things, but he scowled, as he gave the order to ride forward, for he liked neither the King's new commission nor the manner of it. The Welshmen came on, and in a little while the leaders had met and exchanged credentials.

"We will go forward," said Price, signing to the troopers of both companies to fall in behind them. Lyst rode on sullenly, he liked not the new man's assumption of authority, yet he had his own orders from the King and he durst not disobey them. The Welsh leader was silent, biding his time and arguing a stout resistance from the ex-Friar.

The road rose gradually as they proceeded, leaving the Severn Valley behind them and entering into the mountain fastnesses that lay to the north-west. Skirting the Berwyn range of hills, they took the road to the south of it, until Cefa Coch, standing out from the comparatively level tract of country, pointed their way to the Dee and to Llanderfel. The road descended sharply to the stream, and thence to Llanderfel was but a short ride.

A great dread was upon Lyst. The memory of the night that he had spent in the wilds of the Welsh mountains, of the old seer's prophecy, of the weird mists that had hindered his progress to the shrine, weighed him down and held him back. As the horses clattered into the straggling path that led through the village to the church, he shuddered.

He looked anxiously at Price as they drew rein before the church, but the Welshmen laughed carelessly as he dismounted.

Lyst turned to his men. "Fall in behind me!"

he said sharply, and they obeyed, Price looking on with a little surprise. "No pillage, men!" said Lyst sternly. "While you are under my command you will do the work you came for—and *no more*." The men made a sound of dissent. "Hark you!" he cried, "any one of my men who lays a finger on what belongs to the King's Grace dies!"

There was a moment of surprise at the firmness of his tone.

"Was that quite wise, friend?" asked Price, who stood with one hand on Lyst's bridle.

"It is my order; dispute it an you list, sir Welshman."

"The less for you the more for me," he said; "and now to work!"

A few of the country folk had gathered round the church, for the news of the approach of armed men had caused a little stir in the quiet village. A few more were kneeling in the church, and before the famed shrine itself a dozen or so of pilgrims were at their devotions. In one corner knelt an old woman, her hooded cloak topped by her high-crowned hat. By her side was a man in the prime of life. They were absorbed in their devotions, and appeared not to have noticed the new arrivals. Price advanced up the aisle, followed reluctantly by Lyst, and their troopers followed them with ladder and hatchets. A woman screamed wildly, and in a moment all was confusion. Holy silence had fled desecrated, and in its

place rang the oaths and shouts of armed men and the shrieks of terror-stricken women. There was a rush to surround the shrine with its image of Derfel Gadarn bestriding his gigantic steed.

The troopers shook themselves free of the pilgrims who strove to hold them back, but the hooded woman rose from her corner—and the man who had been kneeling at her side. She faced a trooper who would have planted a ladder on the very step of the altar.

“Forbear!” she cried, and though she spoke the ancient Cymric of her people, and he could not understand her words, he drew back before the light of prophecy that gleamed in her eyes. Her hat had gone in her sudden rising, and her hood had fallen back leaving her bareheaded, with her scant white hair streaming in elf locks over her face and upon her shoulders. She stood with her finger pointed at the man in warning. “Forbear!” she cried. “Whose hand is raised against Derfel Gadarn, is raised against his own house. The day comes—it comes—when the clouds that gather shall burst. In that day there shall be many to mourn and few to rejoice. In that day thy sons shall perish, and thy daughters shall be accounted of ill repute. In that day the dogs shall lick thy blood, because thou hast not spared the innocent, nor the weak, nor the holy place! I have spoken, and the words of my prophecy shall fail not. In this generation, they shall come

to pass—in the generation of this day they shall not fail! Woe is me for my prophecy! and woe for the man by whose hand my word is fulfilled. Woe to the shrine, and to the forest—for the forest shall burn as it was foretold by the men of old. I see stars in heaven, and above them rides Derfel Gadarn and the forest in flames!”

“Take her away!” thundered Price, for his men had paused in their work, and some looked fearfully on the prophetess, and from her to the huge statue before which she stood with her black eyes darting fire at them from under the straggling hair that hung about her face.

The man stood facing her and the shrine, her words had stirred his heart, and he waited but a sign from her to strike down the man with the ladder.

“Why wait you?” cried Price to the latter.

“Nay, it be no part of my trade to fight with women,” he said sullenly.

“Take her away!” said the leader again. Lyst appeared not to have heard him, and Price motioned to one of the troopers to obey his order.

The man grinned. “I am in Master Lyst’s company,” he said as he stepped back. The old woman still stood on the very steps of the shrine, and her eyes gleamed menace.

Lyst shrank behind his companions.

“Nay, then!” shouted Price. “In the King’s name, an none of you will take her away, I must e’en take her myself, for go she must, and shall.”

He stepped forward and laid his hand on Megan's shoulder.

Lyst had recognized the old seer of the hut by the river, and he was sore afraid.

"Come on, mother!" cried Price roughly; she shook him off.

"You shall perish—you and your sons and your daughters, and nothing of you shall remain," she said, and her eyes were like flaming swords.

He took her by the shoulders, and threw her forcibly from the steps of the altar. The man's hand went to his side, and he drew his sword.

"Put up your weapon, my son," she commanded; "the prophecy must be fulfilled, only so shall this man fill up the measure of his wickedness. You come in your hundreds from out of the east," she chanted, "but you are evil, and your countenances are false. Evil is to evil doers, and woe to him by whom the prophecy is fulfilled. Woe to you, Ellis Price, you have slain the innocent, and taken the goods of the holy place. Woe!" She lifted up her arms to heaven as though she would seek a confirmation of her words—there was the sudden swift flash of a blade, and Megan lay at the destroyer's feet before the shrine. Hubert threw himself forward to ward off the blow, but he was too late—she had already fallen, and a trooper who saw him, struck him down.

Lyst sprang on Price angrily. "Nay, we war not on women," he said, "and the man but de-

fended her. This is no work for the King's men ! To me, my men all. This work shall to the King !”

Price shook him off roughly. “ Think you the King will care about yon old hag ?” he asked, and would have spurned the body with his feet but that the other prevented him.

Lyst bent down to the two who lay before the shrine, but they were already past his help, and the thought of their blood's cry smote him with a sudden fear.

“ Bear them hence, my men,” he said, and a great silence fell upon them all, and Derfel Gadarn looked down upon them as they bore the slain from the church ; and they bore them through the village, and to a wood beyond hard by the road, and there they left them, for there were evil men abroad, and evil deeds yet to be done, and it might not be that Price should strip the shrine, and none be at hand to compel him to send the treasure and the image to the King, as his Grace had commanded.

There was a sound of hatchets in the holy place when Lyst returned with his men, and the great statue of Saint Derfel the Strong was lying on the steps of the shrine where it had fallen under their blows. Lyst looked at it aghast, yet his terror for the woman's death had been the greater, while for the man it was the fortune of war, and he had died as a man should. The ruddy streams of their blood still lay about the altar steps, as the anointing of

a fearful consecration, and the great hand of the saint that had been hacked off lay in a pool of the mingled sacrifice, as though he would take up the challenge, and fulfil the words of the old seer's prophecy.

For a moment the ex-Friar stood rooted to the spot, but the spoiling of the shrine had already commenced, and he had to watch Ellis Price lest the guerdon of their evil deed *went* not to the orderer of it. All was done at last, and the great wagons were packed and sealed, and delivered to certain men of Lyst's company, and certain others of Ellis Price's, to be conveyed to the King.

"So ends the prophecy," laughed Price. "Yon image will scarce set the forest on fire now."

He looked closely at his companion as he spoke, but Lyst stood apart from him, and there was a frown upon his face.

"Prophecy will ay fulfil itself," he said slowly, like one who wakens from sleep. "There be other forests besides this of Llanderfel—and prophecy is prophecy—or imposture. Belike the old seer's words will come true yet."

Price laughed again. "A new seer hath come to Llanderfel," he sneered. "See to it that your words come true, or it may be that the King's Highness will have somewhat to say about the matter. He liketh not prophets, Master Lyst."

He turned away carelessly, for he had given instructions to his men to stay in the village over



night, and none of the villagers durst refuse to take them in, so great was the fear of the strangers that had fallen on all the place.

Lyst stole back fearfully into the dark church, and onward to the empty shrine. There, in the place of Megan's death, and of that of her son, who had dared to come to her aid, he reviewed the events of the past months with their hateful servitude to the King's creature. The fear that had conquered him had fallen from him for the time, like an outworn garment. Megan's words had stirred him greatly, and her sudden passing, and the sharp manner of it, had paralyzed him. The quiet moonbeams stole in through the windows, and flooded the sanctuary with cold light. It fell upon the dismantled altar where the gigantic steed of Saint Derfel Gadarn still stood sentinel, though hacked and mutilated by the axes of the troopers; it fell upon the altar steps and the stone pavement, still crimson with the life-stream of old Megan and her champion, and upon the severed hand of Derfel Gadarn himself.

Lyst shuddered as he stooped and raised the hand which lay palm upward in a ruddy pool, and bore it down the aisle and out through the door and down the street, until he came to the wood where the bodies lay. There he stopped, and placed the giant hand at their heads as if to invoke the protection of the Strong Champion for his slain defenders.

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## CHAPTER XVII

### BINDING AND LOOSING

It was still dark and the fogs of winter wrapped the palace of Whitehall in a shroud of silence. From a room in one of the turrets a thin streak of light penetrated between the heavy curtains that hung before the casement. But none saw it, unless it might have been the watchman as he stood below and cried in his wheezy, fog-choked voice that it was four of the clock and that all was well.

The Lady Anne issued from her apartments, and threaded the dimly lighted corridors like a tall ghost in white satin robes with ermined train and the flash of many jewels about her head and neck. She had but one attendant, who bore up her heavy train, and they went forward in silence until they came to the turret chamber. For an instant a watcher on the inside threw open the door, letting a flood of soft light from many tapers stream across the dark passage, but only for an instant, for as soon as the Lady Anne had passed the portal the door was softly closed and locked from the inside.

The lady's face was pale, and her breath came and went tumultuously with the varied emotions that her situation called into being. She had reached the height of her ambition, and she went forward—to her fate! Henry stood at the far end of the room before an altar hastily prepared, draped with white and crimson hangings and ablaze with lights and jewels. His dress was scarcely less elaborate than the Lady Anne's, for he was attired in pale-blue satin with gold trimmings and the Order of the Garter at his throat and knee. He held his plumed cap in his hand as he stepped forward to meet his bride. Her dark eyes flashed proudly as he took his place on her right hand, and the attendant chaplain read slowly and solemnly the words of the marriage service. The King responded heartily, and the Lady Anne's voice scarcely faltered as she uttered the words that united her to the King. The chaplain was less at his ease than the two who knelt before him, and plighted troth that was no troth, and marriage vows that were a mockery of marriage. Henry had lied to him boldly, or he had never ventured to bless that unhallowed union, yet while he deemed not that the King would so deceive him, he more than half suspected some trick. The marriage ceremony was followed by the Mass, an even greater blasphemy at such espousals. That over, the King rose.

“You are content now, sweetheart?”

"Ay, I am content now, Henry. Less than your wife I could not be—nor less than Queen."

He started. "That will come in time, Anne."

"Let it hap before long, Henry," she said, holding back a little from his proffered embrace.

He laughed a little. "Ambitious woman!" he exclaimed, "so wife is not enough; she would be Queen too."

"Ay, Henry, queen of your heart first—of your realm afterward."

He drew her to him and kissed her on the lips. "Mine now," he reminded her.

"And always, my liege," she replied.

"Ay, sweetheart," he said absently, "but now you must to your chamber with all speed, or the day will break and our secret become known." He turned to the attendants, who had withdrawn themselves a little from the bridal pair: "None must hear of this marriage, until you are commanded to speak," he said sternly. "Adieu, Anne."

She swept him a low stately courtesy, and passed down the room from the brilliance of the bridal altar into the dark shadows of the corridor beyond. Alone she went—a solitary bride without her groom—yet no warning fear stilled the exultant beating of her heart; she scarce realized what was passing, so did triumphal thoughts make music in her soul, and drown the minor chords of doubt or fear.

And the rest of the year passed bravely, one

triumph but the stepping-stone to another, until the King had made Cranmer Archbishop of Canterbury. He at least was her friend, she knew, and she looked to him for the crowning triumph of her cause—the overthrow of her rival and her own solemn crowning.

And Katherine the Queen lay ill at Ampthill, and another year wore on to May, and still she waited patiently, wisely refusing to acknowledge Cranmer's power to unbind her marriage knot. The sun stole in through the curtained window and fell upon the bed. The Lady Katharine lay back wearily amongst the pillows, and a cough racked her from time to time that stole her breath away and left her without strength.

Donna Maria bent over her anxiously. "There is a messenger from the King, madam," she said.

"I cannot see him now, Maria—unless it is necessary," she added as she saw the look on her lady's face.

"He brings news of the Archbishop's Court, your Grace. I fear me 'tis no good news either, yet 'twere best perhaps for him to declare it."

"You know?— You have heard?" asked the Queen faintly.

"Nay, not for certain, your Grace, but the messenger is Lord Mountjoy, your erstwhile page—and——"

"Yes—and?" asked the Queen quickly.

"He asked for the Lady Dowager, your Grace."

Katharine closed her eyes for a moment ; when she opened them again she fixed them on her lady's face. "The King has bought Cranmer !" she said, and sighed. For a few moments longer she remained silent, then she said : "Call all my servants to me ; it is long since I have seen them ; bid them all attend me, and witness what is said."

Donna Maria retired for a few moments to give the necessary orders. The Queen lay white and still with closed eyes. When the members of the household filed into her room and stood facing the great bed with its crimson hangings she seemed to sleep. Donna Maria approached her softly, and the Queen opened her eyes.

"Welcome, my friends !" she said. "I have called you together to witness our interview with the King's messenger, Lord Mountjoy."

There was a little stir of pity and one old man growled under his breath : "Lord, in seeth a lordly upstart——" but she silenced him with a gesture.

"Bid the King's messenger attend us here," she said.

The old man who had spoken went to the door, for he stood the nearest to it. "Come in, sir," he said softly ; "pray you be gentle," he added under his breath.

Mountjoy looked at him scornfully, but the

Queen was speaking, and he had no chance to retort.

"Your charge is in writing, or by word of mouth, sir?"

"By both, madam," answered Mountjoy.

The Queen rose slightly on her elbow. "Read on, my lord," she said, and the cough hindered her from further speech.

The man looked distressed, but he obeyed. "To the Princess Dowager!" he began.

"Nay, my lord, I am not so styled; your message to Katherine of England is to the Queen—not to the Princess Dowager, for such I am not; yet you say that your mission is to me."

"Nay, madam, I was instructed—pray you pardon me—to call you Princess Dowager, and that by the King's own command."

Katharine waved her hand in protest. "Nay, my lord, I am the King's true wife; wedded to him openly, as many know and can bear witness, in the church at Greenwich. I have borne him divers children—the Lady Mary, and others who looked on life and liked it not, and so returned to God, not through my fault. I was crowned and anointed Queen by holy unction and the blessing of the Church. Therefore I *am* Queen; you cannot take my queenship from me. After I am dead men will say, 'Here lies Queen Katharine,' and some will weep for memory of my woes. Therefore, my lord, I take you and these friends

to witness that I am true wife and Queen, and that I will so vindicate, challenge, and call myself while life shall last."

"It may not be, lady. The King's Grace is discharged of that marriage, and hath contracted a new matrimony with his dearest wife, Queen Anne, whom God preserve."

The Queen rose from her pillows: "Nay, that he cannot do, for he be married already. He hath a lawful wife. Hath the King forgot?"

"Nay, lady, the King is all sorrow for your Highness; he bitterly deplores his youthful sin. He blames you not, but you are not, nor ever have been, wife to him."

"Who hath said so?" she asked sternly, and her eyes, large with the languor of her sickness, looked searchingly around.

"'Twas the Court's award, madam."

"What Court? I know no Court. I did appeal to Rome, yet no judgment hath come thence. What mean you all?"

"Madam, I know not. Yet I am well assured that the King sorrows for your grievous wrong. Believe me——"

She stopped him, then—"My Lord Mountjoy, you have fulfilled your mission. Return and tell the King that I, the Queen, refuse the judgment of his Court. Tell him that I insist that Rome shall speak before I bow to this decree. Tell him that I have ever been most dutiful and humble as



a wife ; that now I pray him, for his soul's sake, to undo the wrong that he has done ; to take me back for the few days of life that still remain to me. Bid him remember our child, and her who bore her, and for the Queen's sake to use our daughter with all gentleness. Is there aught else ?”

“Nay, madam. 'Tis a sorry task the King hath set me. He bids me say that should you prove unyielding to his will, he will strip you of your fortune ; that if you consent he will increase your pension as Princess Dowager. He bid me further say, that if for vanity you still retained and used the name of Queen, it would be to the undoing and the hindrance of your household and your child.”

“For the Princess, our daughter, 'twas God who gave her to us, and I will render her again to the King, her father, for she is his daughter as she is mine, putting my trust in God that she shall prove in all things an honest woman. But hark, my lord ! Not for my daughter, nor my household, nor my possessions, nor any earthly thing, will I yield in this, or forswear myself, putting my soul in danger. Bring me the papers and a pen.”

Mountjoy approached the injured Queen with the parchment in his hand.

“Nay, my lord, give it into my hand,” she commanded sternly, and took a pen from Donna Maria. “I call you all to witness my protest,”

said the Queen, and with the pen she scored out the words, 'Princess Dowager' wherever they occurred. "Take the parchment again, my lord, and tell the King that the Queen bends not."

Mountjoy bowed.

"I give you farewell, lady."

The Queen dismissed him with a wave of her hand.

"I would I had another message for his Grace," he said.

"Farewell, my lord. I do indeed pity your plight, for that, being the King's man, you are forced to browbeat a lady, and that lady the Queen to whom you once also swore allegiance. Go, my lord, ere long you may be forced to swear another allegiance."

She fell back again upon her pillows. "I have been ill so long, Maria," she murmured, "and I would fain write to Father Forrest. Ah me! poor friar! poor Queen! poor woman, whom to befriend is to be undone!"

The lady signed to the household to depart, and they filed out, sadly and slowly, as they had come.

"Bring me paper and pens, Maria," said the Queen.

The lady obeyed, though the tears fell fast, hindering her sight.

Katharine wrote on swiftly, and the lady sat by her at her embroidery frame waiting her pleasure.

She wrote diligently and long ; at length the missive was complete and sealed.

“ Call Thomas—or take the letter to him. Bid him ride with all speed to London, and to seek Father Forrest at Newgate. Bid him bear greetings from me and this letter ; though I fear me much lest the letter bring harm to the Friar, yet am I the cause of his suffering, and I would not that he should think me ungrateful.” She lay back, and her eyes closed.

Donna Maria stole out softly to go in search of the servant, and despatched him with the letter.

The days passed heavily for the sorrowing Queen and her faithful friends. The Queen’s infirmities promised her a speedy release from the troubles and perplexities that wellnigh overwhelmed her. Once a member of her household spoke hardly of the Lady Anne.

“ Curse not ! curse not !” cried Katharine ; “ but rather pity her. Her time is short. Not long will she survive me, and before she goes hence all men will hold their breath for pity.”

Donna Maria’s eyes sought Katharine’s face, and she trembled a little, for it was borne in upon her that the Queen’s words would come true.

On the sixth day Thomas came again, and was ushered into the Queen’s presence. His voice shook and his knees trembled as he knelt by the Queen’s couch.

“ I bring you good greeting from Father Forrest,

madam," he said, and handed her a package. "He sends your Grace his rosary, for that he deems he has but a short while to live. He bade me thank your Grace for your words of comfort, and beg you not to fail to pray urgently for him, that he may play the man—his death being at hand. For the rest, he bids me say that he is but ill lodged and in much misery, but that he looks to death to free him soon. Also, he has been able to do some little good in his gaol, for which he thanks God. I have a letter here which he sent your Grace, but he bade me say so much, for dread that his letter might be stolen from me."

Katharine raised the package to her lips. "For this service, Thomas, many thanks. I would that I might repay you, but of late my pension be not paid. I hope when this matter be settled to requite my faithful friends, but for the nonce I can give but thanks—and, it may be, prayers."

"The Queen's thanks are enough reward," said the old man ; and he kissed the hand which the Queen extended to him ere he rose from his knees.

"Come hither, Maria," said the Queen, when he had gone out. She had undone the package, and drawn thence a string of worn beads—the rosary of the Friar who lay under sentence of death in her cause in Newgate prison.

Donna Maria knelt by the Queen's bed, and

she raised the chaplet to her lips and kissed it fervently. "God send him a quick release from his pains!" she said.

And the Queen said: "Amen! He dies in my cause, Maria. We must pray for him. Afterward he will plead for us."

For long the lady continued kneeling by the Queen's couch, and her lips moved now and then, as if the supplication of her thought were not enough for her earnestness.

Katharine lay back with closed eyes and the unopened letter clasped in her hands, and Donna Maria never knew how long the Queen prayed with her, for when she raised her eyes Katharine was sleeping.

\* \* \* \* \*

## CHAPTER XVIII

### "FAREWELL!"

THE Lady Alison strolled in the park. She was both pale and thin, with dark circles under her eyes made by the tears that she resolutely suppressed. She was at liberty for a time, for the Lady Anne had ridden forth with the King's Grace, and had not yet returned.

Alison walked slowly, her eyes bent on the ground, for she was lost in thought. It was long since she had heard of the Queen; save for a slight message that had come to her by a serving man who had ridden in Katharine's train to More and had since returned, there was not a word. Yet the girl knew full well that the Queen had not forgotten her, and that if she sent no token it was because she deemed it were ill advised.

Sir James, too, had disappeared entirely. Sometimes Alison was tempted to wish that he would steal a visit to Windsor, but she checked the rising thought as soon as it presented itself for the other thought of danger for her lover, and, womanlike, she joyed to think him safe, even if

her own heart was heavy with sorrow at the separation.

She raised her head, for from the distance she could hear the sound of merry laughter and the trampling of the horses of the returning party, and she shrank out of sight behind some brambles that rioted over a clump of low thorn-bushes, gay with white and pink blossoms, hanging in great clusters amongst the dark green leaves and thorny stems. She smiled a little wanly as she sank upon her knees close to the cover, lest she might be seen and dragged forth, for her heart was out of tune with revelry and the light jests of courtiers. They swept on past her. Alison saw the King, a gorgeous figure in green, and the Lady Anne in flowing draperies of yellow silk, with the flash of jewels in her cap and at her girdle. The girl sighed as she contrasted the favourite with the stately Katharine, and rose from her knees to follow her mistress to the castle.

Another figure emerged from hiding at the same time, a countryman in all seeming, dressed in russet, with a stout staff in his hand.

“The Lady Alison Ward,” he said, more in the tone of one who made a statement than of one who asked a question.

Alison turned to him. “What would you?” she asked.

“Nay, you have but a poor memory for faces, lady.”

"I know not——" she began, and stopped as the man doffed his cap and stood smiling at her. Still she hesitated, until he swept her a mock courtesy and twinkled his eyes with a whimsical expression. A light came to her. "Patch!" she exclaimed.

"Nay, not so loudly, Lady Alison. I come from the Queen."

"Yes?" she asked.

"I have a message. She remembered our adventure at Greenwich, and trusted it to me," said the man soberly. "Yet her Grace's news is none of the most joyful kind. She gave me no letter, for—'written words are dangerous,' she said. It is anent the Friar Forrest."

"What of him?"

"Nay, 'tis a most grievous matter, lady; he is in prison at Newgate, and for his championship of the Queen's cause adjudged to die."

"To die! To die, Patch! No, Patch, not to die——"

"To die, lady. And by the ordeal of fire. The Queen bids you pray the Lady Anne to plead for him, and that you will not forget him, nor her Grace, in your orisons."

"The Lady Anne! I fear me, Patch. Yet I will do the Queen's behest. But it was the Lady Anne's doing that he was taken, or so I heard."

"She went to him in prison and tried to bribe him to aid her, that much the Queen's man,



Thomas, discovered from the gaolers. Father Forrest spoke not of the matter himself. If the Lady Anne interfere not, he is lost."

"How now, Mistress Ward?" Alison turned to face—the King. "Who is this fellow?" he inquired.

The jester broke in : "Patch ! an't please your Grace. I did but bring a message to the lady."

"So, Lady Alison ! And from whom might the message be?"

The man put his finger to his lips.

Alison hesitated for a moment. "Nay, my Liege, he comes from the Queen—with a message to me concerning a petition that I am to make to Lady Anne."

"From Katharine ! And would she sue to Anne ? I must confess this passes all belief. What is the petition, Lady Alison ?"

"Nay, that is for the Lady Anne's ear. It was for her to sue to your Grace."

"And I would that you should sue to me, Lady Alison. Before you ask I promise you your boon."

The girl looked at the King incredulously. "It was for the life of Father Forrest, your Grace," she said. "The Queen would have had me sue the Lady Anne to intercede for him."

Henry laughed. "The Lady Anne ! Why, Forrest hath no worse enemy than she——" he broke off suddenly. "Get you gone, fellow ! And bid the Lady Katharine be easy. The Friar shall

go free this time, but let him beware of offending again." The jester lingered. "Nay, you would have a token to bear to the Princess?"

"The Queen would find it hard to believe my story otherwise," said Patch.

"'Tis well for you that you are but a fool, Patch—a wise man would have suffered for that word. Bid our dearest sister take our royal word for it, and in token thereof, bid her accept this ring." He drew one from his finger as he spoke, and handed it to the Queen's messenger.

The man bowed. "Thanks to your Grace!" he said, and turned away into a narrow path that led into the woods beyond.

Alison stood still, afraid to go without the King's leave.

He laughed at her difficulty. "So, Lady Alison," he said, "the King is not altogether so black as he is painted." She made a little gesture of deprecation, and moved as if to retire.

"Nay, lady, that were ungrateful!" he cried. "Get what you will and run away—marry! I thought not so of you, Lady Alison Ward!"

"My duty—the Lady Anne hath returned—she will be asking for me."

"Lady Alison, you owe me some thanks," said Henry gravely.

"I thank you, my Liege. I thank you a thousand times!"

"Nay, lady, I would have proofs——"

“If I can serve your Grace in aught, I pray you——”

Henry seized her by the arm. “I have you now; think not to escape me so easily,” he said, and the girl trembled in his grasp, yet her brave eyes flashed defiance at the King.

“I pray your Grace to let me go; the Lady Anne will be waiting for me.”

“The Lady Anne! Nay then, I think ’tis more like to be some gallant in our train. Lady, you are over nice—I thought to claim a kiss for my reward.”

She wrenched herself free with a sudden desperate movement and sped over the grass in the direction of the castle, leaving the King laughing and scolding by turns. She passed in through a side entrance and so to her own room, for she was flushed with running, and the tears were very near her eyes. With a feeling of desperation she locked the outer door, and then she flung herself on her knees beside the bed, and gave way to the tears and sobs that would come in spite of her efforts to hold them back.

“James!” she cried, “James, come to me! Come to me, for indeed I need you! If you are alive, hear me, beloved! If you are dead, stand near me till I die too—for I fear——” She stood up and held out her hands imploringly, for in the intensity of her appeal he had seemed to be near her.

A door that communicated with the Lady Anne's apartments opened softly, and the King's favourite entered the room.

"What means this, Lady Alison?" she asked, and paused, struck at the girl's expression and at the despair of her gestures.

Alison turned suddenly. "Madam!" she cried, "Oh, madam! I pray you help me. The Queen bade me to love you well, to serve you faithfully, and, if I needed a friend, to be very sure that you would be a good lady to me."

"What fear you?" asked Anne coldly; so coldly that Alison deemed an icy hand had been laid upon her heart, and was crushing it in an iron grip.

"Nay, that I cannot say, Lady Anne. Yet, 'twas a fear that gripped my very soul, and showed me dizzy depths that frightened me. 'Tis past; but I would that I might go hence. I fear me that the Court life be not good for maids." Her face was so pale, that Anne took and led her to a seat; her hands were cold and clammy, and trembled in the favourite's grasp.

"My Lady Alison," she said more kindly, "speak no more now, an it please you not; you said 'twas past. Take heart of grace and be brave, yet would I fain know what spectre 'twas that so affrighted the Lady Alison Ward." And speaking so, she smiled.

The girl looked up pleadingly.

“Indeed, madam, to tell you would be to wound you.”

“How wound me?” asked Anne haughtily.

“Nay, that were telling,” said Alison firmly.

“Then I must know, since if the telling would wound me, it must be my affair—and my ladies have no right to withhold aught that concerns me.”

Alison let her eyes wander over Anne’s face, but she saw no sign of relenting there. “Do not tempt me, Lady Anne,” she said, “but suffer me to depart.”

“I cannot spare you, Alison,” said Anne sharply. “There be few so loyal as you be—and——” she broke off suddenly.

“I—the King——” whispered Alison. The two women looked long and deeply into one another’s eyes, and each knew that the other feared the King.

Anne sighed and turned away. “What of the King?” she asked.

“He came to me in the park but now—and I fled from him,” said Alison, and she turned her eyes from Lady Anne, lest they might wound her more than her words.

“You fled? You did well, Lady Alison! O God! give me patience—and wit!” she cried, and paced restlessly to and fro, the swish of her silken skirts the only sound in the silent room.

The sun went down royally in crimson and

purple with gold and green, and a curtain of fleecy clouds crept up into the darkening sky. From the battlements came the boom of a gun, but Anne never paused in her walk.

"'Tis sunset!" cried Alison. "Lady, I must away to-night!"

Anne paused in her walk, and stood opposite to the girl. "You shall go, Lady Alison; for your own sake you must go—but I know not how you can go alone!"

"Send me to Hawsker, madam."

Anne started. "I had not thought of that," she said slowly. "Yes! but how?"

"I know not, madam. Yet I think that I might attire myself in somehow else other than at present, and so depart unknown."

"But for way companions? 'Tis a long journey, and the road beset with perils. I know not—ah! 'tis a strange world, Lady Alison, and it may be that we are farthest from happiness when we have attained our heart's desire."

The girl looked at her wonderingly, longing to comfort her, for the Lady Anne had never spoken to her so freely before, and she wondered if the King's favourite were already reaping what she had sown.

"The Lady Mary Howard goes to-morrow," said Alison thoughtfully.

"The very opportunity!" cried Anne, in a relieved tone, "you will be safe with me till then."

You shall ride with her ; her Grace of Norfolk will see to it that you are fittingly accompanied to your father's house."

Alison breathed freely again, and the strained look left her face. "A thousand thanks, madam!" she cried, throwing herself impulsively at Anne's feet.

"Nay, you owe me no thanks, girl," she answered coldly ; an I had not asked the King's Grace for you, you would not have been in peril. 'Tis ever thus—those who are faithful are blown away by every chance wind that comes."

"But some remain, madam ; I am but a girl, and I do not count for much, having neither wit nor courage, as you have told me many times."

Anne laughed. "Wit enough to escape," she said, "and courage to withstand the King."

"Nay, madam, there be danger that no woman may stay to face—think not evil of my flight."

"I know ! I know, Lady Alison. Farewell !" she said abruptly, and passed to her own apartments again.

Alison was too much moved to think ; she wondered a little, too, if Sir James Blundell would be able to find her in her northern home, or if indeed he were still living, seeing that she had heard nothing since the night of their betrothal and farewell at Westminster. The thought roused her with a sudden stab of pain to the realization of the present, and she gathered

together her few treasures that she might carry them with her when she fared forth to a new life, to new adventures, perils or disappointments. Queen Katharine had said wisely that the Lady Anne could best help her in her difficulties, and her words had proved true in the hour of her utmost need.

\* \* \* \* \*



## CHAPTER XIX

"THE QUEEN IS DEAD : LONG LIVE THE QUEEN !"

THE Queen's dressing-room was softly brilliant with many wax tapers that stood in great candelabra at either side of the long mirror. Anne was at her toilet ; by her side stood a lady-in-waiting with a costly basin of gold, quaintly chased, a gift to her from the French King on the occasion of her Coronation. The Queen's kirtle was of tawny yellow satin, with a green velvet overdress, and train richly furred with ermine. Her dark hair was gathered into a coif of green velvet strewn with pearls, and a necklace of the same gems vied with the whiteness of her throat. She studied the effect carefully, bending her long neck this way and that to note the effect of the ornaments. The mirror gave her back a fair picture of a pale woman with dark eyes and hair not unpleasing, though she had not the pretensions to beauty of the deposed Queen.

"It will do, I think," she said in answer to some question of the lady, and turned aside to wash her hands in the basin that another lady held for her.

A page knocked at the door. "Sir Richard Southwell would speak with her Grace," he said.

"Let him come in," said Anne, taking a towel from the lady who stood waiting with it on her arm.

He entered immediately, and knelt to the Queen. "God save your Grace!" he said. "I bring you news—of great moment."

"News!" cried Anne gaily. "Then you be welcome, sir, for times be dull here, and no news hath travelled Greenwich-ward since Christmas."

"Nay, lady, my news be not of the gay sort. The Lady Katharine hath passed to a better world."

She stood for an instant without answering him. The blood rushed to her cheeks and fled again, leaving her deathly pale.

He watched her. "She hath a heart, after all," he told himself.

It was a little while before she recovered from the shock. "Tell me again," she said, and her voice sounded hollow and trembling.

"The Lady Katharine is dead, madam."

"Is it true?" she asked, scarce daring to believe him.

"Ay, it is true enough, your Grace. The poor lady breathed her last on Sunday at Kimbolton Castle. I have posted hither with all speed."

"Doth the King know yet?"

"I am but now come from his Grace. He prays

you to excuse him for to-night ; he would fain be alone, he said. In truth, he looks much shaken at the tidings."

"Why, sir, you have brought me such news as I should scarce have dared to think possible. Now I am indeed Queen, having no longer any rival in the King's heart, nor in the hearts of his lieges. 'Tis well ; I pray you accept this bowl, 'twill serve to remind you of the service you have done me this day."

"Nay, lady, I would thank you largely, but that my tongue be all too rough and untutored for the office—yet, believe me, I am grateful for your largesse.

"And the King's Grace ? Doth he appear sad, silent, or as if he needed wifely consolation from his Queen ?"

"Nay, Lady, he be sad. He said : ' I most do grieve for the deep sorrow we did our dearest sister Katharine. Poor lady, she is well at rest. I cannot grieve for her, yet I—and all of us—have suffered loss, and this land of ours is the poorer for the death of her, our one time Queen.' "

"Ha ! said he so ? I pray you, sir, tell us how she died."

"'Twas two of the clock when the lady passed. At ten she had been annealed, and through the hours she lay devoutly, speaking scarce at all, save for words of prayer. Then, when the hour came, she turned to us and smiled, and murmured softly

in the Spanish tongue to Lady Willoughby, and so her soul passed gently from this world that too little loved her—and, I verily believe, at once to heaven.”

Anne frowned. “I more do grieve the vaunting *how* she died, than that she *died*; or so will the common people learn to flaunt the King’s true wife.”

“Nay, madam, since the Lady Katharine hath passed, there be none who dare assail our new-crowned Queen,” he said gallantly. “I pray your leave that I may retire,” he added.

“Ay, go, Sir Richard! we would be alone; your tidings are so new that we would learn to know them true and ourselves free from rivalry.”

He bowed. “Madam, farewell, and for your largesse, thanks!”

“Nay, you are welcome, sir. An you bring such news again my largesse shall be doubled. But that’s impossible!”

“I pray so, lady.” He bent the knee in farewell, and turned away with a curious expression on his face.

Ere the door had closed behind him he heard the Queen’s voice again.

“Bring me my lute,” she said. “It is not every day a rival dies, and I could sing, for I am merry!”

He shivered as he passed out of hearing, but Queen Anne was in a joyful mood, and she sang sprightly French songs that she had learned at the Court of Queen Claude.

From a distant room the King heard the faint twang of the lute, and the mocking voice of Anne, and he scowled and bade them shut the doors and draw the curtains close.

The following morning a page waited on the Lady Anne with a missive from the King. Anne frowned as she looked up from the paper in her hand, and the attendants watched her anxiously.

"Tell the King," she said, as she finished reading the note, "that I would speak with his Grace anent this matter."

The page bowed. "Madam, I will tell the King," he said, and sped on his errand.

It was not long before the King came. He was dressed in black, and looked heavy and sad. He greeted the Queen gravely.

"How now, Henry?" she said, smiling up at him. "Wherefore this solemn mien—are you not glad?"

"Glad?" he exclaimed, and recoiled from her much as he would have done from a snake. "Glad? Nay, Anne, the Lady Katharine hath passed; she was our companion for a score of years—a most sweet lady, wise and discreet, with charity for all within her heart. Should I, or you, or anyone, be glad that Heaven hath taken our fair sister home?"

"Yet, my dear Liege, I have been glad to know my rival gone—to know myself doubly

your wife and Queen—with no more fear of rivalry from one so perfect in all queenly graces as the Lady Katharine,” she answered, with a touch of mockery in her tone.

“I fear me, Anne, we did our sister wrong. My conscience——”

Anne laughed. “Nay, nay, my Liege, your conscience hath many sides. But yesterday—or was it last year?—it was not long ago—your conscience was uneasy, for that you feared the same most excellent lady was not your lawful wife, and now it seems—or I am much mistook—that this same conscience is uneasy lest in undoing that wrong you wronged her. Go to, Henry! I am your wife; I cannot hear you say you wronged the Lady Katharine. That were to say I wronged her too. If so I did, then am I less than wife, and less than Queen. You make of me a wanton and yourself no less.”

Henry looked at her sternly.

“So! you are letter perfect, Anne. You had my commands?”

“Ay, I had them, Henry. Why should I feign to mourn when in truth my heart rejoices? Why should I dress in solemn black and go—a mummer—to a funeral service? Nay, I will speak truly, my Liege, I am not grieved. The Lady Katharine was a good woman, but deadly dull; as pious as an abbess, but not suited for the state to which you raised her. She is gone to

heaven—where she'll be happier. Where's the cause to mourn?"

"For losing of so virtuous a lady, Anne. Have you no heart?"

"Nay, I gave it to your Grace long since," she answered readily. "Henry," she continued, throwing one hand over his shoulder, "do not force me to play the hypocrite. I am glad the Lady Katharine is dead—so am I more your wife and more your Queen. She made a Christian end, they say, so she's in bliss, and all our wrongs are righted."

He rose suddenly and her hand fell away from his shoulder. "I must away, Anne. Is this all that you can find to say to me anent this matter? I thought to find your woman's heart more tender, your eyes in tears, your conscience a little stirred—but it would seem that you are harder than myself, since I found tears, ay, and shed them, Anne, and am not shamed to own it, for the passing of the Lady Katharine."

"You loved her still?" she hazarded, and stood with her hands pressed to her breast as if she might but still the beating of her heart. "You loved her more than me?"

"Ay, for I loved her longer, and more worthily. Hark you, Anne! I made you wife and Queen—thrust Katharine from my bed and from my heart, yet she was noways in fault. Think of what she lost that you might gain; how she was

debased that you might be exalted, and, think again, which was the nobler part, the better lived, the truer and more honourable?"

"She never was your wife!"

"Tut! tut! that's a tale will do for others! You and I know best. The world must be hood-winked, else 'twould come crying after our successors, 'Make place! Your parents were not wed!'—and thrust them from their honourable state."

"Nay, Henry, 'tis but natural you should grieve; you knew her well, and loved her one time."

"You knew her too. I mind me when you waited on her word, obeyed her glance, and joyed to serve so excellent a lady."

"That time is past. Twit me not, Henry, for that I served your wife."

"Twit you, Anne? Nay, 'twas the most honourable time of your life!"

"Peace, peace, my Liege! and since we agree not in this matter, suffer me to do my will. I would not play the hypocrite."

Henry turned on his heel. "Have your own way; you'll, maybe, live the longer," he said as he banged the door to after him.

"So that is all," mused Anne. "Well, I am Queen, and I'll not give in. At least my place is sure at last, for the King loves me well, and his hope. . . ." She clapped her hands, and a lady



came swiftly at the summons. "Bring me my yellow silk," she said, "I would see it, and my crimson nightgown, and my jewels—I would see what I will wear to-night."

The lady started. "Madam, the King has ordered black—have you forgot?"

"Have I forgot? Go, girl, before I trounce you. No, I have not forgot. Is this a time of mourning for my Court? Must Queen Anne feign to weep for Katharine—the sometime Queen, the once reputed wife of our royal husband? So would the world make merry at our expense! On second thoughts, I'll go myself to the wardrobe, and see the gowns, and there make choice." She rose hastily to follow the lady.

A page appeared suddenly. "Master Cromwell, madam."

Anne frowned. She wondered if she were about to be subjected to another ordeal, but she had not seen Cromwell for some time, and there were questions that she might discuss with him.

"Bid him attend me here," she said. "You may go; I will see the gowns presently," she added to the lady.

The girl retired, and Anne picked up her lute from a table and seated herself again. She was busily engaged in tuning the instrument when Cromwell was announced.

He gave her a shrewd look, and came forward quickly.

"God save your Grace!" he said.

"I thank you, Master Cromwell," she answered slowly, as though she were still thinking of her work of tuning the lute, then, with a pretty little affectation of starting, she held out her hand; he raised it to his lips.

"God save the Queen!" he said meaningly.

"Ay," she said, "I am Queen now!"

"So you were before, madam!" he said gallantly.

"Nay, sir. It seemeth that the King is sore at heart for the loss of his sometime wife. Nay! his sometime mistress."

Cromwell knit his brows. "'Twere idle so to call her, your Grace! The people may be so deceived, but not the King, nor I, nor you, nor Cranmer!"

"You dare greatly, Master Cromwell!" she said, and her eyes flashed with the anger in them.

"I dare because I speak truly, madam. But all is over now. The Lady Katherine can claim neither honours nor state, but only a grave and a requiem."

"Ay, there's the rub, Master Cromwell! It seems that the King wills us all to wear mourning and to make lamentation; to attend dirges and to be sad. 'Twould be hypocrisy—and so I told him—if I did the like."

"'Twere policy, your Grace—and you have flouted the truth for policy ere now."

"You too! I thought you were my friend!"

"I am, else I were not so bold; 'tis only friends who dare speak truly when the truth wounds."

Anne looked at him keenly. "I would I knew exactly whom to trust, and of whom to beware," she said.

"An you did, you'd be invincible," he said dryly. "Trust no man—beware of all—if you would be safe."

"And happiness?"

"Expect it not—only the dead are happy."

"Katharine is happy then, for she is dead."

He bent toward her a little. "May she rest in peace." He drew a package from his doublet. "I had designed to offer the Queen a gift for the new year," he said, laying it in her hand; "'tis late, but I have been from home travelling in the King's service."

He waited while she hastily unfastened the ribbon that bound the little parcel. The removal of the silk covering disclosed a leather case. She was flushed and curious as a child might have been, and he watched her. A cry escaped her as she touched a spring and the case flew open, revealing a large emerald mounted in gold, and depending from a crown of the same metal incrustated with pearls.

"'Tis beautiful, Master Cromwell! I thank you, sir, for the emerald is the queen of the gems—so I have ever thought."

Cromwell looked gratified. "It is a fine stone, your Grace, almost peerless. At least, I know of none finer."

"I have never seen a larger stone nor a finer coloured one. A royal gift, Master Cromwell, yet I fear me lest you have wasted over much of your substance on me. The gem is a princely offering and of price."

"Nay, then, I am well pleased, madam," he said. "I pray you not to cross the King in this matter of mourning for the Lady Katharine; 'twere but ill advised to do so," he added.

Anne straightened herself. "That matter is between the King and me. We understand each other," she said icily.

"'Twere better to be careful, your Grace. Where Katharine fell from favour, 'twere not impossible for others to be deposed."

She rose haughtily. "Nay, sir, take back your gift! I had not thought in accepting it to let you buy such freedom."

Cromwell winced as she placed the gem upon the table. "Pardon me, if my regard for your Grace forced me to forget your place," he said deprecatingly.

"Neither you, nor any other hath leave to speak so to us," she said stiffly.

"I cry your pardon, madam. I did forget my humbleness in a great desire for your welfare. Pray you accept my gift again in token of forgiveness."

She smiled and held out her hand for the jewel. He kissed her fingers as he took up and placed the emerald in her hand again. "Now I feel forgiven," he said.

"And I will forget, Master Cromwell," she replied softly, "but see to it that you offend not so again."

"I never will, madam," he assured her as he gave her farewell. "At least she is the first now," he said to himself, as the curtains dropped behind him, "and 'twere well to have her good offices until the time is ripe for another."

Anne hurried to her mirror. "Bring me my gowns," she cried, and held the emerald to her throat to note the effect against her white skin. "A goodly gift! and from Master Cromwell! I marvel much that it should come from him, and how he came by it." For a long time she stood examining the jewel and its case lest any indication of its history might escape her. But the most minute investigation failed to reveal any more than she already knew. "Strange!" she ejaculated, "yet I could swear that he came not by it honestly; so much for sure. Be careful, Master Cromwell! for an I have need to check your ambition, you have e'en given me a likely means."

To the lady who came at her signal she repeated her order. "Bring me my gowns!"

"They be here, madam," answered the girl quietly.

Anne walked over to the table where they lay. "Take that away," she said, touching the crimson satin with emerald, "and that blue taffatas. The yellow gown will be my choice—that—and the emerald. Now dress me with all speed, for I am Queen to-day, more than before." She seated herself, that the lady might remove her gown of rather sombre purple. "I hate it!" she cried, and there was a gleam of savagery in her dark eyes; "'tis so like mourning. Hasten, girl—I would see the effect."

With trembling fingers the lady-in-waiting obeyed her, lacing her yellow robe, and hanging strands of pearls about her throat.

Anne added Cromwell's gift. "And now I am a Queen!" she repeated, "with no solemn spectre to mar my queenship. Go, girl! bid the ladies attend us—they can to their prayers and requiems another time. To-day we dance! The Queen is dead: long live the Queen!"

\* \* \* \* \*

## CHAPTER XX

### THE HAND OF DERFEL

SIR JAMES climbed to the top of the hill. From that vantage ground he could follow with his eye the winding track that crossed the side of the slope until the steep incline came to a sudden end against one more distant that lay behind it. The day was clear, with rather more than a touch of frost on the leaves and on the grass that bordered the hill path. It was three days since Megan had departed with her son, forbidding the knight to follow them, excepting only that three days should pass without their return—and this was the fourth day.

Sir James had looked for their return the evening before, and was still loath to go after them, lest he might anger his foster-mother, for her command had been peremptory. The wind came down from the higher hills with unwonted sharpness, and there was something peculiar in the tang of the breeze that was almost eerie as it struck him on the unsheltered path across the mountain. Now and again little eddies of wind descended

into the valley below him, tossing crimson and gold leaves aloft, and whirling them around only to leave them higher up on the hillside than their parent trees. In a sheltered crevice of the pathway he encountered a little heap of these that the wind had so deposited. He shuddered unaccountably and crossed himself fervently, for they seemed things of ill omen, a sign of woe to come. The wind kept the mists from settling down over the paths, and he walked swiftly, for it was a long distance to Llanderfel, and his mind was full of misgiving. Ever and anon his eyes searched the road before him, but always unavailingly, and he pushed forward, wondering a little what had kept Megan and his foster-brother.

At noon he brought forth some bread and cheese that he had brought with him, and sat down by a little brook that rustled and plunged and tumbled over the mountain-side on its way to join the river below. The trees that fringed its margin were bare, even the little ferns that clustered on its banks in the summer-time had yellowed, and lay dank and lifeless, floating on the surface of the flowing stream. But the brook was beautiful, and the sound of its onward rush was soothing, and when he had eaten, and taken a long draught from the friendly little stream, Sir James sat awhile to rest, and so fell asleep.

When he awoke it was evening, and the wind had fallen. A guilty feeling of having slept at his



post assailed him ; he bethought him lest Megan and Hubert had passed without seeing him. He half turned back, hesitated, and resolved to go on to Llanderfel in any case. The brook presented an obstacle to his progress, but a hurried search rewarded him, for he found a place where he could cross it dry-foot on the stones, and so landed without accident on the farther side.

And then the darkness fell, softly, silently, swiftly—as it falls amongst the shadows of the mountains. He had lost the path too, or he had misunderstood Megan's directions. Before him lay a thick wood, and beyond it rose other hills that seemed to hem him in. But the worst evil of all had befallen him when he lost the river which was to have been his guide. He sat on the arched root of an oak and tried to think, and there seemed to be nothing for it but to remain where he was until daybreak, so he stretched himself on the moss that covered the ground as with a carpet. A haunting fear of disaster came to him, and he strove vainly to repel it ; a fear that urged him forward to Llanderfel with all speed, and his forced inaction became hateful to him. The memory of Alison was with him too, unusually vividly, and he longed for news of her. His hand stole to a little pocket where her picture lay next his heart, and he raised the miniature reverently to his lips, as he would have venerated a holy thing. Through the stillness he fancied that he

could hear voices—two at first, then one, a woman's:

"James! James! If you are alive, come to me!"

He started to his feet; it was Alison's voice—he felt he could not have been mistaken, and he turned towards the direction whence seemed the sound. He stumbled against a tree.

"I come, Alison! I come!" he shouted; but the silence mocked him, and he realized that he had but dreamed. An uneasy feeling that all was not well with his betrothed, that some peril threatened her, maddened him. He groped by the tree, and on in the fancied direction of the voice, when the rosy glow of a fire at no great distance caught his eye. It was in the depths of the wood, and he wondered greatly who could be camping in the mountains. The vividness of the dream came upon him again, and he sought to hasten forward, more than half expecting to find Alison the captive of some lawless band, and calling upon him to rescue her.

Then he crept on more warily, determined to seize upon every vantage that the wood offered for cover. The way was difficult, for he could find no path, and the undergrowth was thick in places. In spite of all his precautions a twig would snap now and then, or a bramble cling to him as he passed through them, and once he fell heavily on his face, breaking a stout branch as he did so. He waited for a while, but no alarm

was given, and he crept on steadily towards the camp.

He emerged into a sort of dell. The open space was covered with moss and grass, very soft and springy, and his footfalls were inaudible. Apparently there was no watch kept, for the men appeared to be all asleep, wrapped in coarse blankets and lying around a goodly fire of wood and turfs. It had died down somewhat since he had first seen it, and now it glowed red without flame, and a light, rose-coloured smoke curled lazily upward, casting a veil across the stars. Sir James crept nearer. The fire was pleasant after his damp bed on the bare ground, and he seated himself in the depth of the shadow cast by a bare hawthorn bush to investigate matters. Apparently it was not strictly a camp, but a bivouac of armed men with some expedition afoot.

A little to the left he could see the horses tethered, and the men had no tents, nor, indeed, any provision for camping save the blankets in which they were wrapped. They were not troopers either, as far as he could discover, though the insufficient light made it difficult to determine exactly. A sudden thought came to Sir James. He hesitated for a few moments, then he put his fingers to his lips and blew a call like a robin's note thrice repeated. A figure stirred slightly, as if he were listening. The knight repeated his performance with a better heart. The figure

stood up and looked around, but the glow of the fire confused his sight, and for the third time Sir James blew the call.

"Come hither, friend!"

The knight knew the voice—it was the outlaw! He rose and came forward.

"Nay, it is the knight of the forest! Where is your servant?"

"I know not—I be in search of him. I have tarried with his mother, who is also my foster-mother, these months past. Four days ago they went up to Llanderfel, and they have not returned. I go to seek them, but the night came down too soon, and I am belated."

"So it would seem that Providence has thrown you in my way for the second time. I also go to Llanderfel. There is news that a man—one, Ellis Price—is abroad with troopers, and that they design to rifle the shrine and destroy the statue. There be a wealth of gold and gems about the saint, and it hath excited the cupidity of those robbers."

"'Tis well!" said Sir James shortly. "And if you will permit me to go with you, I would fain strike a blow in defence of the holy place. But I have no horse; I came afoot, deeming that the path would be over difficult for a horse."

"We can spare you a mount. Have you supped?"

"Nay, I have not eaten since noon, having thought to reach Llanderfel before night."

The outlaw produced some cold meat and bread from a wallet, and bade the knight refresh himself. "We shall be in Llanderfel two hours after sunrise," he said, "and we can buy provisions there." They sat talking softly by the dying fire. Sir James was full of anxiety to know what had befallen since he had left the outlaws in the forest, but their leader had little or naught to tell.

"Life in the greenwood hath no history," he said, "and the doings of Courts have lost their interest to men who carry their lives in their hands."

Sir James nodded. "Yet am I wishful to hear of a lady at the Court. She is about the Queen's Grace."

"The lady you told me of! Are you betrothed?"

"We are betrothed, sir, and it be many weary days since last I looked upon her face. I dreamed to-night that I heard her voice calling to me to come to her for that she was in peril."

"And you woke?"

"Ay, I woke and went in search of her. I deemed that some band of men held her prisoner here when I saw your fire."

The outlaw laughed. "You know not your friends, Sir Knight! I would that we had the lady in our safe keeping, but we will find her—never fear it. I doubt she's scarcely at the Court still,

for Queen Katharine hath been dismissed long ago, and the ladies of her household are reduced in number."

"The Queen dismissed! Nay, then, you give me news, sir. I knew not of it. I was concerned in carrying some despatches between her and——"

The outlaw laid his finger on his lips. "No names, Sir Knight—remember our rules."

"A trice to your scruples, sir! I have proved you and know you for a friend."

"Better that friends should know naught—best for both sides."

"Well! you may be right. See! the dawn is creeping up the sky; we shall be able to set forth ere long."

"Ay, and come what will, I am with you in this adventure. Did I not promise to aid you at call."

"A thousand thanks. Indeed, I scarce looked to claim your promise so soon."

"First we will to Llanderfel, for we must indeed intercept those robbers, and then to your other quest, Sir Knight. I give you a toast," he added, drawing forth a flask of red wine—"To the lady!"

"To our speedy reunion!" said Sir James, as he drained the horn the outlaw handed to him.

And then their hands met, and Sir James looked long upon the outlaw's face. "If it were permitted to remember a friend," he said slowly.

"It is not permitted—yet," returned the outlaw, and their grasp tightened.

"To the death!" said the outlaw.

"To the death!" repeated Sir James, and each knew that his soul was knit to the other's in a bond like that which bound David to Jonathan, the son of Saul.

The crimson light flashed suddenly above the mountain in long rays that reached upward to the zenith.

"Look!" cried the knight, "here be dawn in earnest; now for Llanderfel—and our quest!"

The men rose at the sound of his voice, and in an instant all was haste and preparation for the start. For a moment the men looked surprised to discover the knight in their midst, but some of them had seen him before, and one of them had waited on him at their haunt in the forest. None spoke, only one or two of them raised their eyes to Sir James with a flash of recognition.

"Bring Black Prince!" cried the outlaw, and a superb charger was brought forward. "Here is a mount for you, Sir Knight!" exclaimed he, and Sir James sprang to the saddle nothing loath, for he was anxious to be off. His mind misgave him since he had heard his host's tale of Price's proposed raid, and the time seemed all too long until they could reach the place. They went forward briskly in single file under the cover of the wood, for the way was somewhat difficult,

though two of the band went forward with axes to clear the way a little for the horsemen. They were clear of the wood at last, and struck a fair road that enabled them to make good headway.

The outlaw rose in his stirrups and waved to his men. "Trot!" he said, and the silence of the mountains was broken under the hoofs of the oncoming horses. Yet he still held them in hand, for he was not wishful to arrive on the scene with horses and men out of breath with undue haste, not knowing how soon the shock of the encounter might be upon them. They crossed the river, leaving Cefa Coch behind them, and struck into the pilgrim-worn path that led to the shrine. The green woods were spread on either side of them now, and they went forward cautiously, until they came to a fork in the road, and the outlaw motioned to them to take cover again. Then, entering the wood, they proceeded singly, keeping the road on their left, and halting from time to time to listen. The stillness was unbroken, save for the patter of a scurrying rabbit now and then, or the startled cheep of a bird as it fled from the unwonted sight of armed men.

The outlaw reined in his horse, and beckoned to Sir James to join him. "'Tis odd!" he said, "the place looks deserted." He pointed with his finger to an opening in the trees, through which the church and village were visible, like a picture framed in brown lacework, with here and there a



remnant of autumn foliage to add richness to the design.

Sir James rode forward a few paces. "We are too late!" he cried; "they have been here before us—see! the road is trampled by the hoofs of horses, and there are deep ruts, as of waggon wheels, before the church door." 'Twas even so.

The outlaw's brows came together in a frown, and he rode on. "Forward, at the trot!" he cried, as his horse emerged from the wood on to the highway, and for the second time in that week the good folk of Llanderfel heard the trotting of horses and the jingling of spurs in their quiet village street. But this time they kept close hidden behind the heavily barred shutters of their cottages, and fared not forth to note the doings of the strangers. And bitterness entered into their souls, and distrust, and wellnigh unfaith, for had not Derfel the Strong failed them? Had he not allowed the enemy to ride away, carrying his image with them, and leaving the prophetess lying slain in the church with her son who had died in her defence? And they remembered not, that of all of those who dwelt in Llanderfel, not one had come forward to aid the two dead champions.

The outlaw drew rein before the church. "Our first duty is here," he said, and he entered the sacred building, followed closely by Sir James. The open doors blew to and fro upon their hinges, for none had thought to close them, seeing that the

shrine was empty, and that they were no longer needed to guard the holy place. Already the weather had set its seal upon them, and the pavement was strewn with wreckage, and upon the altar steps was a deep crimson stain.

The outlaw pointed to it. "There was resistance," he said.

Sir James stopped and picked up a hunting-knife that lay there. "Poor Hubert!" he said; "it was his. He fought here; that much is certain. I would that I knew if the miscreants slew him."

The gigantic horse of Derfel Gadarn looked down upon the desolation of the shrine wistfully, as though he implored them to take him too, now that his master had gone.

The knight stood lost in thought; the outlaw had been hastily examining the church; he touched Sir James on the shoulder. "Come outside!" he said, and the knight followed him.

The men had dismounted and stood by their horses, each with his hand on his weapon in case of surprise; but the man who had waited on Sir James in the forest held their horses before the door of the church.

The two friends came forth.

"I be most heartily sorry for you," said the outlaw, resting his hand on the knight's shoulder; "they have been taken prisoners I have but little doubt, for if they had been slain they would have been lying there still."

"Unless the villagers buried them, for Christian pity."

"There be no one here," said the outlaw decidedly, looking at the closed and barred cottages.

A trooper pointed upward with his hand—they followed the movement with their eyes, and saw a thin faint column of blue smoke curling upward against the brown of the bare branches. For a moment they stood waiting—the outlaw spoke not for a few moments, then he strode forward, signing to the others to remain still. They watched him as he passed from door to door, knocking at each and obtaining no answer, until he reached the house whence the smoke curled heavenward like a signal.

An old woman came to the door at his summons, and answered his inquiries in Cymric. "Who be you?" she said, and her high shrill voice rose on the question.

"No matter who I be. 'Tis no concern of yours, dame," answered the outlaw. "There be those I seek—friends of mine—belike slain by the hand that wrecked yon shrine," he said, with a wave of his hand.

"And you are not of their company?" she questioned. "No?"

"I am not," he said almost fiercely.

She looked at him steadily from under overhanging brows. "Your face be true," she said. "Who be yon men?"

"They be my followers, come to protect the shrine—but we came too late," he said, and hung his head.

"Ay! You come too late whatever," she said, and wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron. "Ay! 'Twas a fearsome sight—two corpses on the altar step—and the shrine sacked—and the Saint carted away on a big waggon—the King's—so they say."

"Two corpses?" It was Sir James who spoke. He had come forward, seeing that the outlaw was speaking with the old woman.

"Ay, two! An old woman and a man—maybe about your age."

"And did they bury them?"

"Nay, I know naught of that—they rode away, and when we looked the next day the corpses were gone."

The outlaw glanced toward his men, and made an exclamation of surprise, for from every closed cottage a head was poked, warily, as if its owner were ready to retire at the slightest hint of danger into its retreat.

Sir James's eyes had followed his. "Marry!" he cried, "so the village be not deserted after all."

"The people lie hid," answered the outlaw, "lest Price should return. There be nothing more for us to learn here, and 'tis scarce wise to linger over long, for an we fought we should gain

nothing by it now. The slain are dead—and the shrine is sacked—and Derfel Gadarn is overthrown! though I would he had first fulfilled the prophecy.”

Sir James looked up quickly. “You knew it?” he asked.

“I knew it,” answered the outlaw sadly, “and all the greenwood knew it, and waited for it to come true.”

“Nay then! For the greenwood, it may chance that it were best unfulfilled,” answered Sir James. “I go with you now,” he added, “if you will, for I have none who need me. My foster-mother and brother are dead, the King is angered against me, even my lady is lost to me, and I know not where to seek her.”

The outlaw threw his arm over his friend’s shoulder. “You ride with us for the present,” he said, “but you are not of us, for we be outlaws, and you have yet to win your wife. For her sake I will not permit you to join our company; yet you are welcome to stay with us as long as you will.”

They had passed through the village, and the woods closed in the road again.

The outlaw gave a sudden cry, and leaped from his horse, turning into the wood on his left. “Come, Sir Knight,” he cried, and Sir James followed him. A giant hand lay upon the grass at the outlaw’s feet; he held back the brambles

that obstructed the view, and the knight fell upon his knees with an exceeding bitter cry, for he had found those whom he sought, and on the dead face of Megan was a smile, and on that of Hubert peace—and they buried them with prayers, and tears, and honour, but the hand of Derfel Gadarn they carried with them, for a token of that which might be.

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## CHAPTER XXI

### THE KING'S PROMISE

THE Queen's letter had cheered Father Forrest somewhat, but he knew that his time was short, and that any visitor might prove to be the herald of the fiery ordeal that awaited him. The dread of that final suffering crept over him at times, though he strove to drive it from him, and to remember the promise of Derfel the Strong Champion that had been given to him on the night of St. Stephen in the church at Greenwich. At other moments he longed for the moment of battle, that he might the sooner be done with the miseries of his imprisonment and enter into his rest.

The departure of the Queen's servant with his reply to her letter had seemed to snap the last link that held him to earthly things, and from that time he gave himself more entirely than ever to unceasing prayer. Since his condemnation he had been thrust into a narrow cell without light, and the hours had dragged on with no perceptible difference between night and day, save that he

fancied that the rats were more numerous at times, and then he thought that it must be night in the world above him. Once or twice they had assailed him, and he had beaten them off as best he could.

The rattling of keys in the lock disturbed him as he knelt at prayer, and he rose to meet the visitor, not entirely without dread lest the unwonted interruption might presage some fresh encounter of wills between him and the human ghouls, who feasted their eyes on the tortures of helpless men, who should have had their pity. The door opened slowly, and the gaoler stood back as though to suffer another person to pass him. Forrest stood rigidly expectant, with his eyes on the open door.

"Bring me a torch, sirrah!" cried one in the passage, and Father Forrest knew that his visitor was the King!

Henry took the torch from the man's hand. "Leave us!" he commanded, as he entered the cell and closed the door behind him.

The Friar's eyes dwelt on the King's face, and he marvelled at its gravity, and that he was dressed entirely in black.

"The Lady Katharine be dead!" he said abruptly.

Forrest could not suppress a movement of surprise. "May she rest in peace!" he said, and waited for the King's word.



"It came to me, Friar, that I had promised the Lady Katharine to let you go for this time. She be dead now, and my heart is grieved. I would keep my word."

The Friar made no reply.

"Last night I dreamed that our dearest sister came to us, and upbraided us for that we had not kept our word. In sooth I had quite forgot it."

Forrest still stood silent and motionless. If this were a new endeavour to entrap him in his speech, he needed to be cautious, for his soul's sake.

"You be not over thankful for our clemency!" cried Henry.

"Nay, my Liege, I but waited to hear the conditions."

"As cute as a fox, Friar. There be no conditions. But beware how you come here again."

"I thank your Grace," replied Forrest.

"Nay, thank the Qu—the Lady Katharine," said the King hastily.

"I go to pray for her," answered Forrest quietly.

"Ay, pray for her, Friar; and forget not me in your orisons, for there be much to plague me."

The Friar knelt. "Nay then, God give your Grace a long and happy life, and in His mercy grant you grace according to your mercy to the poor Friar. For myself I thank you, yet am I still more glad for the evil deed you will leave un-

done than for mine own poor life, which be indeed near to its end in any case."

Henry was visibly moved. "Rise, Father Forrest," he said, extending a hand to assist the old man. "Now get you to some safe place where you will be hid from your enemies. A King can do much, but there be some things he may not do twice, and there be tools that he must use, and they be edge tools and dangerous for a man to play with. Go now." He motioned Forrest on before him.

"For the deliverance you bring to me this day, my Liege, may God deliver you in your day of peril," said the Friar, as he passed through the open door and to the passage beyond, the King following him, torch in hand, but not speaking to him again.

And the Friar passed thus through the inner and the outer gates of his prison, until he stood a free man once more on Holborn Hill. The fresh, sharp air and the sunshine were a keen joy to him after his life amongst the rats in the darkness of Newgate Prison. He looked up into the blue sky and knew that he was free—that the terror of death was lifted from him for a while, for the King had said so, and he blessed the King. He knew that he was to walk the earth again a man amongst his fellows, and that the King himself had freed him, and he rejoiced that justice had overcome enmity and revenge. He wondered a

little at Henry's softened mood, and spied the open door of St. Sepulchre's Church over against the prison, and it invited him to prayer for the dead Queen and the living King. The wonder of it all held him in a sort of ecstasy, and he forgot that he was hungry and homeless, cold and feeble; forgot that he had a long weary walk before him ere he could reach his convent; forgot almost that he needed aught—for the glory of his freedom.

The light began to fail before he realized these things, and he stole quietly from the church again, and so to London Bridge. The darkness had fallen when he reached the other side, and he walked through the green lanes of Bermondsey and Rotherhithe, but his strength began to fail him at the last, and he went ever more slowly and with greater difficulty, so that it was late when he came near to Greenwich. The houses were all dark, for the curfew had long since rung from the belfry of the church.

There were lights still to be seen at the palace, and once or twice the old man caught a strain of music and faint sounds of revellers.

The church was dark too, and the friars were at rest in the dark friary that lay so sombrely peaceful under the frosty sky. The stars held a new joy of their own for him, though he trembled with cold and weariness as he knocked at the gate for admission. It was long ere the sleepy brother porter came to the wicket, but when he saw who

it was who stood without, he threw back the door right joyfully and fell at the old man's feet.

Forrest bade him rise and call the Warden, who came, very full of wonder and delight not unmixed with fear. "You will tarry with us this night, Father Forrest?" he asked wistfully, and the Friar went to his old cell.

In truth he was more worn out than he knew, and it was some days before he was able to take his place in the life of the Friary. Then he consulted with the Warden, for he judged that Greenwich was too near the Court to be a safe abode for him after that warning of the King's, and on the sixth day after his liberation he went quietly by water to London, and so to Greyfriars by Smithfield, and there he tarried.

\* \* \* \* \*

## CHAPTER XXII

### ON THE ROAD NORTH

ALISON opened her eyes, with a sensation of having passed some barrier or escaped some peril, with the thought that the new day held out some pleasant prospect for her. Then she closed them again, while for a few moments she lingered on the borderland of sleep. Memory came to her gently, and she unclosed them once more and sat up on her bed, throwing back her long hair energetically. It was but a few moments before she was up, and ready for what might chance. A maidservant brought her water, and bade her be dressed in an hour's time, for that her Grace of Norfolk had arranged for her journey northward that very day. Alison's heart beat high. The relief was a welcome one, for she had feared lest the Lady Anne's plans might fail for lack of some person to carry them through, and when the Duchess sent for her a little later, she went with a happy flush on her face that brought forth an approving nod and smile from the Queen's aunt.

"You be ready, Lady Alison," she said, as she bent and kissed her lightly on the brow.

"Ay, your Grace ; I would thank you for your goodness," she added, with an upward glance of her dark eyes.

"Tut ! tut ! child, the Queen bade me look to it that you went in safety—she hath a great regard for her lady, I hear."

"Nay, she hath been a good lady to me, madam. I thank her also for her kindness."

"To you or to herself?"

Alison's eyes sought the Duchess' face again, and her brows drew together in a perplexed little frown.

The Duchess laughed heartily. "Nay then, I will not vex you with the like questions," she said. "To the point. There is one here—Master Thomas Askew, a neighbour of Sir Arthur Ward ; he be travelling northward with his sister, Mistress Marjorie, and they have consented to convey you safely to Hawsker. The Queen has provided moneys for your journey, and you are to have the horse you rode from Windsor. So shall you depart fittingly, and I hope that you may arrive safely."

"I thank your Grace," replied Alison, and Thomas Askew being announced as at the door, the Duchess led her to him.

Their farewells were quickly said. Alison murmured a last word of thanks to be conveyed to

the Lady Anne, and they set forth. At Highgate they turned their horses' heads for a last look at the capital. The tall spire of St. Paul's crept upward till it seemed to touch the blue above, and a hundred smaller spires and towers surrounded the mother church, like the children in a home that cluster about a parent. Away to the west she could see the tower of Westminster—and to the east the Palace of Greenwich—and betwixt, the silver thread of river that wound in and out on its way to the sea. Then they turned again to the road that stretched away to the north and so to Waltham Cross, where they halted, for the day drew to a close. The morning found them early astir and riding warily, for they had left the main road for greater safety, and went by fair woodland paths, halting for the night at a cottage, and then on again. And once they rested on the grass-grown slope of a little dell, for the dark fell before they could find an inn. Thus they rode onward, Alison by the side of Marjorie Askew, a golden-haired fairy of some eighteen summers, who was returning from a visit to friends in London to her brother's home on the Yorkshire moors. She was unusually grave for her years, with a depth of thought in her blue eyes seldom seen in a girl of her age. She spoke little, but always cheerily, and Alison grew to love her sweet gravity, even though she felt that the younger girl held her aloof in some sort, and was so puzzled at times.

Master Askew rode ahead of the little party, and behind the girls came two serving men, and a maid of the Duchess of Norfolk's household, whom Alison was taking with her to wait upon her in her father's house.

The third day of their journey Master Askew appeared disturbed. Ever and anon he would cast anxious looks into the depths of the wood. Once or twice he penetrated a little way into the thicket, but he could see nothing, and he returned restless and uneasy to his place at the head of his party.

Alison noted his disquiet and called him to her. "Heard you aught?" she asked.

"Nay, lady, 'twas but a hare that stirred in the thicket," he answered.

And in the evening she called him again. "I think there be some person following us," she said.

A shadow settled on his brow. "Nay, lady," he said stoutly, "'tis but the settling of the birds to roost."

And in a short space they came to a little glade, where they dismounted, for they could go no farther in the failing light. Thomas Askew and the men built a fire of greenwood, and the women lay about it, while the men took turns to watch. But in the night a horse neighed, and Alison's horse answered it, and their animals were restless and uneasy; and though the stranger horse made no further sound, their horses snorted restlessly and



pawed the ground. Master Askew went into the wood, but cautiously, with his hand on his sword ; and he saw no one, nor heard aught save a rustling of the bushes.

Alison rose and stood by the fire, and he came to her at her call.

" 'Tis strange," she whispered.

" Nay, lady, there be nothing there, unless it be the ghostly rider," he said, and crossed himself.

Alison laughed softly. " Rest you, Master Askew," she said. " You are over weary, and we must ride with the dawn."

" Nay then, you are under my charge, Lady Alison, and I may not sleep on my post."

" There be no danger," she said, and there was assurance in her tones.

" I think not," he said ; " I hope not, but it be my duty to make sure not."

And she went back to the fire, and lay down again and watched the stars, and breathed the sweet pure air, and marvelled at the depth of the darkness, and in a little while saw the dawn creep up and up above the tops of the trees, until the whole grew pale and turned to a golden sea of light. Then long crimson rays shot trembling athwart the gold, and the tapestry of sunrise was woven before her eyes. She rose and went to a little distance and kneeled in prayer, for the glory of the morning of life and of the day was upon her, and her soul trembled like the strings of

a harp in perfect accord that wait for a hand to draw forth their music. The maid called her, and she rose slowly and followed her to the camp fire. Marjorie had risen too, and her deep blue eyes sought Alison's dark ones, and their hands met in a long lingering clasp, but they spoke not, for their souls understood.

The hasty breakfast was soon despatched, and they went forward again, but this day Thomas Askew rode by Lady Alison's side, and his hand was very near his sword. And riding thus they came to Grantham at dusk, and so to the Angel, and Alison saw the room where King Richard III. had signed the death warrant of the Duke of Buckingham, and her soul was stirred with pity for the unfortunate nobleman.

The following morning they went forward again, and so speedily came to Newark, and when they rode thence they turned into the woods again, but they heard nothing of any other travellers but themselves, and they came to York in safety on Saturday night after sundown.

Sunday they rested, attending Mass at the Minster, and the next morning found them abroad again, but this time upon the open moor, with the stinging breeze of the North upon their faces, with its tang of the distant sea, and in their nostrils the perfume of the heather, that laved their horses' legs in a sea of purple. Alison's heart warmed to her homecoming, and when a curlew sped by them on its way to the cliffs at their right, her soul sang

songs of triumph for the joy of freedom that was upon her. It was the afternoon of the ninth day of their journey when they saw the Abbey of Whitby standing against the sky, and so descended the slope a little till they came to her father's house.

Sir Arthur Ward stepped across his threshold to welcome his child as she slipped from the saddle, well pleased to have reached the end of her journeyings in safety.

"Welcome," he said, with a wave of his hand to Master Askew and his sister.

"Nay, Sir Arthur, we ride on; the day grows old, and we would be at home to-night."

"A cup of wine at least!" cried Alison's father, and the wine was brought, but they would not dismount, and with hurried leave-takings they rode away.

Alison and her father watched them disappear over the brow of the hill, for their house lay toward the sea.

The girl turned to her father then. "I am glad to be at home," she said simply.

He looked at her long and lovingly. "My Alison!" he said, and there was a great deep of sadness in his voice, "'twas so your mother looked when I brought her home to Hawsker, and lifted her over the threshold. Alas! she left me all too soon—it has been lonely since. But you are herself again—my daughter."

She lifted her arms and clasped him about the neck. "I scarce remember you, father," she said;

"yet I have loved you all through the years, and longed for my home-coming, and it came sooner than I looked for it, after all—and suddenly."

He bent and kissed her, and playfully lifted her over the threshold. "As I did your mother," he said, and Alison laughed.

"That were some other man's duty," she whispered, smiling at him.

"Be there another man, child?"

She paled. "I know not, yet I was betrothed—but he was the Queen's friend, and so he had to fly, but I have promised to wed him, when he comes for me."

The old man's eyes grew dim. "And if he never comes, Alison?"

"Then I will stay by you always," she said gravely, "and when you leave me, I'll to Whitby."

He smoothed her hair. "Nay, nay," he said soothingly, "he'll come, never fear it—and soon. But methought I saw a look in Thomas Askew's eyes that I liked, for Askew be a man, and albeit he be not wealthy, he hath a goodly house, and could give a wife comfort and a safe home these troublous times."

She laughed softly. "Nay then, an he would wed Alison Ward, he'll wait long, for she be betrothed to Sir James Blundell, a good knight and true, and she looks for him to come and take her soon."

The old man sighed. 'Twas but another dream

dispelled, and he was getting old, and had seen many such fall in ruins since the day that Alison's mother had laid her babe in his arms, and slipped smiling from life to death. And the years had brought him their meed of loneliness, when he had deemed it for his daughter's good to send her to the nuns at Barking to be taught, for his sister was abbess there, and she had found a place for her niece at the Court of Queen Katharine. He had taken refuge in his books, and plodded on from year to year, wanting the joy of his child's face, and the brightness of her smile, and the glory of her love. It came to him with a sort of shock how much he had missed through the lonely years, and suddenly he knew that he had grown old and feeble, and tired and grave, and he wondered how the nearness of this young life might affect him—if indeed it would be possible for him to lay aside the habits of years, and take the joy her coming offered him.

She saw the hesitation in his face, and her hand went out to him gropingly—as the hand of one in a strange dark place.

“Nay, grieve not so, father,” she said, for she deemed that his thoughts were with the lost wife of his youth. “It may hap that she knows of my home-coming and smiles upon us.”

“Not for long, not for long,” murmured the old man, and there was pain that was almost joy in his voice.

Alison caught her breath. "Speak not so, father," she said. "You would not leave me—I need you doubly now that I am grown," she insisted, and smiled upon him again through the tangle of sorrow that clouded her dark eyes.

"Nay, child, I leave you not till my time comes—but I am old—'twill not be long before I go to join your mother—and then—I would that I might leave you safely in some brave strong man's keeping, who will guard you against all the world. The times be evil—evil. There be little law left in England, and less observance, and much fighting over names, and much neglect of real things."

She looked at him perplexed. "I do not understand you, father."

"How should you, Alison?"

A little furrow ploughed itself between her brows.

He laughed quietly. "Nay then, I'll not expound it to you, Alison—but hark you, girl!" His eyes flashed with a sort of return of youth, and he threw back his head proudly. "The world of force is on the verge of ruin. The world of mind is in the ascendant. In a little while—in the lifetime of your sons it may be—those old hard things will have passed. To-day we delve, mole fashion, in the ground—to-morrow we shall build upon the hollowed foundations that we have dug to-day."

"Build what, father? How delve?" she asked, and the fear of his answer sickened her.

"Nay, 'twere safest not to open the temple of

knowledge to the uninitiated," he said ; and the fear at her heart grew, for she had heard reports of Sir Arthur's leanings to the new learning.

She said no more, but she put out her hand to lead him into the house.

"The day is ended," she said softly, "and the night is stealing over the moors, and I am tired, father."

He started from his dreams. "I come, Alison," he said, and glanced at the girlish figure at his side. "Ay, I forgot," he said huskily. "I'm growing old, child."

They turned to the glowing hearth, and on a sudden Sir Arthur remembered the outer things of life. "Come and eat," he said, and led her to the laden table that was set for them before the blazing peat fire.

For a little while he watched her, then he fell to his own supper. They spoke but little, for the girl was weary and the man bewildered with the suddenness of her coming. When they rose he led her to her chamber in silence, kissed her once upon the brow, and so left her.

The girl's tears came in spite of herself, and she sobbed out her anxiety, and bitterness, and disappointment, and the sadness that the prospect of many sorrowful and lonely days called forth. The memory of Sir James came to her but to increase her trouble, for it seemed likely that some untoward happening had snatched him out of life, or

it might be that he was held prisoner in some one of the strong castles that were scattered over the face of the land. And then she remembered that in flying from Court she had raised yet another barrier between them, and with her own hand. But of one thing she thought not, because she knew, with the knowledge of perfect trust, that Sir James had never wavered in his faith. If he came not, it was because he could not—of that she was as sure as she was of her own existence, and with the thought she fell asleep.

The frosty moon rose over the thorn-trees that reached to her window, and above, and flooded all the moor with silver light, and lay upon the sea like a blessing from Heaven. Alison saw none of these things, but she dreamed that she stood in the forest again, and heard the 'ghostly rider,' and lo! it was her true knight, and he bent from his saddle and took her up before him, and they fled from the forest to the mountains, and from them to the sea, until they came to Whitby Abbey, and with a murmured cry, "James!" she awoke and found that the moon had vanished, and that the distant sea lay gloriously still under a royal mantle of purple mist, and that the red sun was parting the purple with a new glory of crimson and gold. In the stillness the murmur of the breakers came to her soothingly, and there was born a new day.

\* \* \* \* \*



## CHAPTER XXIII

### AN HONEST GENTLEMAN

THE year drew to its close. Already November was closing in, and the berries were red on the holly - bushes that clustered about the Hall. Alison began to dream of Christmas. Her father smiled at her enthusiasm, and bade her do as she listed, yet he refused to have anything to do with festivities of any description. Since the day of his young wife's death Hawsker Hall was the solitary exception of all the country-side to the festival gathering of Yuletide, and he would not alter his habits now. In short, Alison felt that she was rebuffed, and her activities disapproved. Sir Arthur had slipped back again into his old ways, for the joy of her coming had but interrupted the habits of years. She had so little in common with him that she could not hold his interest, and he looked only for the opportunity of settling her suitably and resuming his solitary life that her sudden coming had disturbed.

And still there was no news of Sir James

Blundell. The girl's heart grew sick with the constant strain of hope deferred, for though the months had sped swiftly enough with their varied interests, she had come to realize that it was years since their last meeting. She recalled his fond words—their brave parting. The memory of it overwhelmed her at times, and she would wander forth upon the moor, or by the side of a little brook that flowed at the bottom of the slope at the back of the Hall. It flowed by peacefully enough in the summer-time, but she had not known it then, and in the winter it went on its way foaming and rushing as if it were pressed for time, and needed to end its existence in the sea, which was, after all, not so very far off. She came to consider it as a living person to whom she might confide her troubles and her joys, her weariness, and even her hopes for the future. Once or twice she had sent red autumn leaves whirling away on the little stream, naming them "James" and "Alison," and stood watching them with strained eyes to see if they came together or drifted apart, and when the busy little brook united them she clasped her hands for joy and thrilled with the happiness of the thought.

But this day the little brook had nothing to say to her, and she called for her horse and rode out on to the moor, for the littleness of stone walls stifled her. She rode on, crossing the stream at a tiny ford, where for a space the peaty water

flowed softly over dark yellow gravel, and so gained the open spaciousness of the bare moor.

The sea of purple heather had faded now, and the moor was bleak and brown, while here and there in sheltered nooks the flaming yellow gorse was blooming out of time. She came to such a patch of gold, and reined in her horse that she might drink in the rugged beauty of the scene. At a little distance from her a flock of bullfinches were perched on the bare branches of a hawthorn bush, and they looked at her with bright, bead-like eyes that made her think of fairies and friendly elves, such as the moor folk spoke of with bated breath on midsummer nights. Above and beyond them rose the top of a grey-brown hill, and behind it Whitby Abbey stood, perched high on the cliffs, at whose feet she knew that the restless sea dashed and foamed against the rocks. She could almost hear the roar of the breakers from where she stood, for the wind came up keenly out of the north-east and brought their distant murmur to her ear. A few miles to the south-west rose the dim, blue-grey distances of Northallerton, and from thence she knew that the land fell away southward to the Swale.

There was a sound as of a horse's trot, and the bullfinches rose into the air. Alison drew in her breath sharply—she had wished to be alone. Then her horse whinnied, and she became aware that the horseman was approaching her rapidly.

There was no escape, for where she stood she was plainly outlined against the sky. For a moment she hesitated whether to ride on or not, then a voice hailed her :

“Good-morrow, Lady Alison !” and she turned to face Thomas Askew, who was drawing rein beside her.

“Where be Mistress Marjorie ?” she asked when they had exchanged greetings.

He laughed. “Making ready for Christmas, Lady Alison. By my troth ! there be naught but preparations in these days, and bare meals for hungry men, for Marjorie be much too busy in buttery, and kitchen, and still-room, to think on such poor matters as dinner for idle folk. So we needs must wait, and say ‘thank you’ for scant meals, and stay our greater hunger on the thought of good things to come.”

Alison laughed heartily. “Tell me, for I was going to ask you : you will come to Hawsker for Christmas ?”

Askew looked at her sharply. “Nay, nay, Lady Alison. Marjorie hath looked to have you for our guest. Sir Arthur Ward keeps not Yule, and so we thought——”

“Keeps not Yule ? Nay then, Master Askew ——” Her voice died away, and fear crept into her eyes as they met his, for she remembered the new learning, and her father’s odd mood when she had spoken to him of festivities for the Christmas season.

"You will come?" asked the young man eagerly, laying his hand on her rein.

"Nay, I know not," she answered, and there was perplexity in her face, so that he forbore to ask her again.

"Will you ride with me?" he asked after a pause, "'tis scarce safe for you to go far from home without escort; but an you will accept of mine, I should be honoured to show you the moor."

She touched her horse lightly with the whip and rode on, he following her. They rode to the west to the higher ground, where from the rounded summit of a hill they could look over an extensive tract of country.

"It is all bare and bleak!" exclaimed Alison with a shudder.

"Not when you know it," he replied, "for when you know it, you come to love it; it has something to say to you in every mood—are you sad, it sheds tears with you; are you merry, the four winds of heaven dance madly on the hill-tops, and play like care-free children shrieking amidst the heather; would you dream, it rocks you to slumber, that so you may dream happily. The moor has a hundred voices, one for every time and every mood. Lady Alison, you will come to love the moor when you have gotten to know her."

She sighed. "You love it, Master Askew!"

"Ay, I was born and bred on the moor; I look to die on it, and to lie in it, when my time comes."

She smiled a little. "You are young yet—too young to have such thoughts," she said.

He laughed outright. "Yet am I older than you be, Lady Alison."

He looked down on her as she rode beside him, and a great tenderness stole into his eyes—but he was silent, for his heart was too full for speech.

"You remember the night of our journey?"

"Which night," he asked sharply.

"The night that we lay in the forest by the fire. The night that we heard a strange horse in the darkness."

"What of it?" he said sternly.

"You said something about the 'ghostly rider'; what did you mean? I have thought of it often since then, and have not been able to understand."

He glanced round quickly, as if to make sure that they were alone, or as though he feared to be overheard.

"'Tis but an old wife's tale," he said deprecatingly, "yet they say, that if a maid who is betrothed rides with a stranger in the forest, the spirit of her betrothed rides beside them."

Alison gave a little gasp, and her face was pale. "Nay, that would be if he were dead, Master Askew."

"Nay, for that I know not—'tis but a tale. An you had not asked for it, I would not have told it."

She was silent, and he thought that he had

offended her, for it was long before she spoke again.

He waited patiently. They were approaching a wood that lay about a stream in a little hollow of the hill that faced the south.

"Nay, I remember what you said—'tis but a hare that stirred in the thicket'—and—'tis but the birds settling to roost'—and—it may hap that your third word was the right one after all."

"The 'ghostly rider'?"

"Ay!" she said, and there was sorrow in her tones that hurt him for her sake.

"Lady Alison," he said, trying to speak calmly, "an you will suffer me to speak, I have something to say to you."

She looked at him quickly, for there was that in his tones that stirred her, she scarce knew why.

"The times be troublous ones," he said, as if to gain time.

She assented with her eyes, her face was so calm as he looked at it, that he began to fear lest he had not understood her aright.

"It be advisable for—for woman—to be shielded," he said, and his voice broke.

She laid her hand on his arm quite frankly.

"As you shielded me, and my father shields me," she said. "Well?"

"Sir Arthur is an old man. Some day you will need a man to shelter you from the storm."

“He will come then—when he be needed,” she said gently.

“Nay, Lady Alison, he be here now.”

She started a little, and her horse moved a little away from his. “Be still,” she said sadly—“be still, for I would not hear more, Master Askew.”

“Than what?”

“Than what you have said. Listen! an I must tell—I must.”

“Nay, lady, there be no necessity—I take your word.”

“Then should I not be content—you knowing less than you have a right to know.”

“Nay, I have no right, you not giving it me.”

“Then would you seek it another time—and I would that this matter be ended now. I am betrothed!”

“Betrothed? Nay, I knew it not. I cry your pardon for my speech, for I have loved you with all honesty. I—nay, I will say it this once, and then let the matter end—I have lived of late for this hour, that it should crush me. I have lived to tell you of my love. It sang a holy song in my heart. I have lived in it since we journeyed here together—those sweet days were the nearest thing to heaven I ever knew—ever shall know—until my time comes to lie in the moor.”

She fixed her eyes mournfully upon him, but she could not speak.

His eyes fastened themselves on hers, and he



went on stormily: "I longed for an excuse to fight for you. I went into the forest to seek an enemy——"

"And you found——" Her voice rang unsteadily, but her face was still pale.

"A woodsman!—some wandering outlaw with no evil intent. I let him go; he would not have harmed you, and he rode with us in the cover of the wood, lest he might fright you."

"Ah!" she said, and a look of expectation leaped into her eyes.

"He left our company at York. I saw him once in the Minster. He asked that he might know your name."

"And you told him?"

"Ay, it could do no harm, for outlaws traffic not with the King's servants, and I was willing to please him in a small matter."

"You are sure 'twas safe?"

"Safe? Ay! Else had I not yielded to his request, for I aspired to make you mine. Lady, I will not so offend again—suffer me once to speak, and then for ever I will be silent. On the day we came to your father's house I saw a look in the old man's eyes that bade me hope, and I took the sweet assurance home with me, shrined deeply in a strong man's heart. Lady, I loved you well, and love you still too well to do you ill. Tell me the name of him you love, that I may serve him for your sake."

The tears rushed quickly to her eyes for pity. "Nay, you know him not," she said. "Yet is he loyal, true, and most faithful—Sir James Blundell. I met him at the Court of Queen Katharine. He was a friend to her cause, and had to fly from the King's anger, yet on the night he fled we plighted troth, and vowed to wed each other and no one else. I have never seen him since, but he will come—I am assured of that. He told me that he would come to claim me, and I wait. For your mistake—I fear it is my fault, for too much hiding of my secret. For that I pray you pardon me—and for your honest love I thank you, for 'tis an honour to a woman to be so loved, and so protected." She laid her hand on his as she spoke; he raised it to his lips.

"For your sake, lady, I will serve this knight of yours, and strive to find his hiding-place, that so you may come together happily, and then—— Ah! then I know not—time alone can tell——" He broke off suddenly, and raised his head as if listening.

"What heard you?" she asked softly.

"Nay, I know not. I heard not anything, yet I am assured that there be someone in the wood."

Her horse's bit clanked, and she tightened her rein. The silence grew deeper; they could hear nothing but their own laboured breath and the note of a robin. Then a rustling in the undergrowth startled Alison, and she laid her hand on

Askew's, but she made no sound, and they watched the place whence the sound had come. A moment later a tall man, clad in russet, and carrying a long bow and a quiver of arrows, emerged from the wood on its farther side, and strode rapidly away. Apparently he had not seen them, and in a little while they lost sight of him behind the shoulder of a hill.

When he was gone, Askew turned to her again. "Yon be a stranger," he said decidedly. "He be no moor man by the gait of him. What a stride he hath! and his stature is more than common."

For a while they waited, for if there was cover for one stranger there was cover for twenty, and discretion is the better half of valour for a man with a woman to keep safely. But for all their waiting no one came, and he turned to speak to her once more.

"I mind me of that night in the forest," he said, as though to revert to their former conversation.

She raised her head, as if to listen. "Ay," she said, "the stars were like suns that night."

He looked more closely at her, and discovered a look of exultation in her eyes, then—" 'Twas a strangely calm night."

She bent her head. "'Twas deeply peaceful," she said.

"You were not affrighted?"

"How—affrighted? I trusted you," she said simply.

"Ay, and I loved you," he said intensely.

She started from him, and her cheeks flushed.

"You forget!" she said coldly.

"How—forget? Lady Alison, hear me—bear with me a little while longer. I forget not—I know not how I could forget—that night. 'Twas then I knew I loved you as a strong man loves the woman he would wed, as he loves but once."

She turned her face from him that he might not see the pity in her eyes.

He divined the reason of her movement, and it gave him courage to plead on. "Listen to me!" he said, and there was insistence in his tone. "I will seek the knight, your betrothed. I will seek him loyally and faithfully, and I will bring him to you an I find him; but an I find him not, I will come to you again, for I may not know you needing a man to shield you from the things that might hap to a lone woman."

Alison looked at him steadily. "An I wed not James Blundell, I wed not any man," she said; but albeit the words and the look were firm, there was a hint of weakness in the voice that he noted eagerly.

"I go to seek James Blundell nevertheless," he said; and her pity grew to keen liking for the man who could so work in a rival's cause, for the sake of a woman's love. And she fell to wondering, if she had not been betrothed to Sir James, would she have loved this honest Yorkshire gentleman?

and if Sir James were dead, would she take him for a protector, seeing that a woman's lot was a hard one, being alone? And he stood a little apart from her, waiting her pleasure, and calming his heart as best he might with honesty of purpose and the might of an unselfish love.

And when the light began to fail—as ever, when the day draws towards sundown, and before the dark begins to fall—he touched her hand lightly.

“’Twill be dark anon, if we return not now,” he said gently.

She looked up quickly and read the honesty in his eyes. “Poor Master Askew!” she said.

“Nay, pity me not, Lady Alison. I be a man, and men be made for work and hard fighting, and a man is less than a man who cannot stand against a thwarting of his will, or stoops to meanness for that he cannot have all he wants.”

She smiled at him bravely. “God keep you, Master Askew! and keep you true, for you are as true a man as I ever met.”

They rode forward in silence, and when they were come half-way to Hawsker the rain began to fall about them.

“Heaven is weeping for our woes,” said Alison softly.

But Thomas Askew answered her not, but his lip tightened, and he held his horse more firmly, and Alison saw and understood.

\* \* \* \* \*

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE PEDLAR

THE greenwood resounded to the note of the horn, the shouts of hunters, and the deep baying of the hounds that were mad with the taste of blood. The outlaw stood aside a little to watch the end of the chase. Before him was Sir James Blundell, whose knife had finished the work that his shaft had begun, and laid low the noble animal from whom the men were calling the unwilling dogs.

"Well done, Sir Knight! I never saw better work done in the greenwood."

Sir James started at the outlaw's words. "Nay," he said deprecatingly, "yourself did better last week—and 'twas a finer stag."

One of the men looked up from his work of cutting up the stag, and paused as though to listen.

The outlaw's eyes followed the direction of the man's glance, and he watched the woodland path that led to the open space where the stag had

turned to bay. The path was very straight for some distance, and the bare brown woods hung closely on its borders, so that the huntsmen had a considerable advantage over any chance comer with unfriendly intent. But, nevertheless, the outlaw ordered his men to lead off the dogs, and to drag the carcase of the stag into the shelter of the bushes. That done, and the traces of the battle covered hastily with leaves and branches, he, with Sir James, remained to watch.

They had not long to wait before a pedlar, tramping slowly and wearily along the road, arrived at the clearing.

With a furtive glance at the two men, he made to hasten on his way with a gruff, "God save you, gentlemen!"

But the outlaw called to him. "Come hither! I would fain see what you carry in that pack."

"Marry, good sir! 'tis naught but kerchiefs for women, and laces—a few ribbons and the like—nothing worthy the attention of your worships."

The outlaw smiled. "Nay, nay, I know the tale! but hark you, we be honest foresters—not knaves—undo your pack, I will pay you for your wares."

The man laid his burden on the ground, and proceeded slowly to the opening of it. "I have naught that might please your worships," he said, lingering ever the knots as though to gain time.

"It may be that we shall find something worth

—and look you! you go not until we see what you may carry through the forest.”

He bent to the old man for a moment, and spoke in his ear. “Nay then, I have the very thing your worship needs,” he said, and fumbling in his pouch he drew out a letter, sewn into an outer covering of leather, and an inner one of silk with ribbon bands and seals.

The outlaw took it from his hand. “’Tis well!” he said. “Nay, open not your pack unless you carry knives or arrow-heads, such as we need.”

The old man nodded briskly. “That have I, worshipful sir—and news——”

“Ah!” the exclamation came from Sir James.

The outlaw turned to him with a smile. “Here be something to interest you, Sir Knight;” then to the pedlar, “Come with us, we will find you a place to rest, and good cheer, for you have come far.”

He led the way with Sir James, and the man followed them with his pack. They crossed the pathway, and struck into the wood on the other side, making many turns, and coming at last to the place with the cave where Sir James and Hubert had rested on their first meeting with the outlaw and his men.

“We can speak more at our ease here,” he said, indicating a fallen tree on which the pedlar might seat himself.

The old man sank down with a sigh of gratifica-



tion, as though the pack had wearied him—but in truth the load of years and troubles that the years had brought with them was far heavier than the bundle of wares that he carried.

He waited for a moment, and then he drew a long breath, as one about to dive suddenly into deep water. "I am from London," he said.

"Ay, I know—from—nay, we will name no names; 'twere better for our friends not to overburden them with perilous knowledge."

The old man looked steadily at Sir James. "I know your face," he said, and the knight started uneasily; "I know your name too, but I will not speak it here—or anywhere," he added, "for I was beholden to the knight, your father—he saved my life once when we were hard pressed at—ah! well, I'll not say where—the old be wary from knowledge what has been—the young are scarce ever wary save they be born old. But to make a long tale short, I come from London, and I bring heavy news."

"Of whom?" The outlaw's question was sharp.

"Of the Queen's Grace."

"The Queen!—which Queen?"

"Nay then, the Queen—the Lady Katharine—she died at Kimbolton in January."

The knight and the outlaw crossed themselves. "God rest her!" said Sir James. "Tell us further," he added.

"The King grieved sorely, so they say," continued the pedlar, "and ordered all the Court to mourning and to prayers. At Greenwich church he held her solemn obsequies—but the Lady Katharine lies at Peterborough."

"And the Lady Anne! heard you aught of her?"

"Ay, sirs, I heard of her. She goes her head-long way to destruction," said the old man, and a fierce light gleamed in his eyes. "They say she flaunted Father Forrest, and he was thrown into Newgate, but liberated at the prayer of the Lady Katharine. When the King ordered mourning the Lady Anne refused to wear it, and dressed herself and her ladies all in yellow on the day of the Queen's funeral."

"'Tis like her," cried Sir James—"a woman who is less than woman, who hath the ambition of a man without a man's power. Faugh! it makes me sick to see such a parody of a woman queening it in the Queen's place."

The outlaw laid a warning hand on his arm. "Friend! we be all friends here; those words are rash, and with other ears to hear would doubtless prove dangerous. Be wary, Sir Knight! or it may hap the lady you seek will be imperilled by your hardihood."

"You do well to chide me, yet my gorge rises at the insults offered to pure womanhood by such a woman. Pray you tell us more," he added to

the pedlar. "Heard you aught at Greenwich of the Lady Alison Ward?"

The man shook his head sadly. "Nay, your worship, I heard naught of her, save that she was sent to wait upon the Lady Anne when the Queen was dismissed from Windsor. I heard likewise that she fled from Windsor. Some say that she fled from the King's Grace and his too warm friendship; others that the Lady Anne was jealous of her beauty and sent her away; but none were sure—only she was gone. I saw her once in London with her Grace of Norfolk. 'Twas but a passing glance as she rode forth with a party, as if for a journey, and I heard not where they went, and though I asked, none could tell me the names of her companions. I would I knew that I might tell you; for once I mind me—'twas when your father lived—I rode forth to war, and when I came back home again, the maid I had loved and wooed, and looked to wed, had disappeared. For long years I sought her, till one day I chanced to visit with my pack a goodly castle—mind, I tell not where—and there the sad-eyed châtelaine midst her maids bought of me stuff for goodly gowns, and gold and silver trinkets, yet as she paid with lavish hand she sighed, and as she sighed I looked again, and my eyes fastened them to hers in a frightened glance. She gave a little cry, and laid a hand upon her fluttering heart, and looked me stead-

fastly in the face, with a great pleading in her woeful eyes. I bowed my head in sign that I understood, and would obey, then hastened from her presence with the pack I had taken as a means to find the maid I sought, and found—wife to a great nobleman—not of her own free will, but of his force, I being absent and reported killed.” The pedlar stopped speaking, and hid his face in his hands.

The outlaw approached him slowly, as if drawn to him by some irresistible force. For a moment he hesitated, then he threw himself on the ground beside the old man. “Nay, I know you now. My mother’s friend—who should have been my father.”

The old man looked up suddenly. “Nay, I named no names, and the lady be dead.”

“Ay, she be dead; she died before my father——”

“Thank Heaven for that, your worship, so was she spared the rudest shock of all—in knowing her son’s father——”

The outlaw stopped him suddenly. “Nay, say it not—the memory rankles too deeply—the injustice cuts too keenly—I cannot remember it and not curse the hand that dashed him to destruction, and left me a wanderer and a fugitive on mine own lands.”

Sir James had stood a little apart from the two men, for he felt that they had forgotten him.

The tragedy of the old man's life had touched his own wound, and it burned and smarted with the new opening of it.

"Alison!" he murmured, and the word was a prayer, a petition that he might be guided to her safely, and not too late. Too late! ah! those words had burnt themselves into his brain—too late! He trusted Alison; yet if they told her that he was dead, would she be able to live alone in these evil days? Would she not be in some sort compelled to take a husband for her protection? He writhed at the problem, and strayed into the wood again, for the outlaw and the pedlar were deep in low-toned converse.

But it chanced that the outlaw missed him, and leaving the pedlar in the care of his men, he sought the knight his friend, for his heart was sore for the fugitive, and he was willing to do much in his service. He found him again at the place where he had slain the deer. It was dismembered now, and one of the men had brought the antlers to Sir James.

"A goodly stag!" said the outlaw. "You must carry the antlers with you when you go north to your father's house."

"Nay, I know not if it still stands. I go not there alone, if I carry not my lady with me."

"You shall carry the lady with you—never fear it," said the outlaw earnestly. "I am sending men north to York, and south to Windsor, and

far to the west where we rode but lately, and to the fens. Belike we shall have news soon, if news there be, but it may hap that the lady bides still in London, and that would be a more difficult matter, for these men of mine know not the ways of cities, though they know every turn and twist of the wild wood, and can make a living in the forest, where your craftsmen would starve."

"And the pedlar?"

"Nay, Sir Knight, the pedlar be an old man, and if I mistake not near his end. He had been my father, had fate not decreed it otherwise, and for that it be so I care not to risk him again in London. I have bidden him stay with us, for he be too old for the road, and the hand that spoiled my father, spoiled him too, he being absent. A——nay, he be dead, God rest him! for I have forgiven him long since."

Sir James held out his hand to the outlaw. "You be a brave man and an honest; I be proud to know you, my friend."

Their hands met in a grip such as strong men give on the eve of battle, or when the tragedy of life moves them strongly, and silence fell between them as they walked slowly back to the cave under the hill.

The men had built a great fire of branches, and the fresh killed venison hung on spits, while fragrant odours arose from a steaming pot that hung in the midst of the red flames. The outlaw

seated himself on the trunk of a fallen tree, indicating to Sir James the place beside him. The pedlar had thrown down his pack, and it served him for a seat. The men passed round great trenchers, and they ate and drank silently after the fashion of hungry men, but when they had finished the pedlar opened his pack and drew forth hunting-knives and arrow-heads which he gave to his host.

"I may scarce use a weapon again, though I was once accounted a good swordsman," he said. "I pray you accept them as a gift from me." He dived more deeply into the pack, and drew forth laces and trinkets and rich silks for women's gowns and fine kerchiefs for their necks.

The outlaw smiled. "For the weapons, many thanks, but for these gauds we have no need."

The old man looked slyly at Sir James. "When the eagle mates he builds her a nest—I pray you choose a gift for the lady who will be your wife."

Sir James started a little with the pain of the thought. "Nay, an you send her a gift, I thank you, sir ; but it must be of your own choosing."

The pedlar thrust his hand into his pack again, and drew out a handful of rings. He turned them over silently, holding them up to the light that he might see their colour and test their quality. He selected a broad band of chased gold with a single large ruby, which he handed to

the knight. "'Tis the colour of love," he said, "and brings happiness to the wearer."

"I thank you—for the Lady Alison and for myself," said Sir James. "If there be any way to requite you for your kindness, I pray you name it."

"None, sir, none, save that you seek and wed the lady with what speed you may, for these be no times for a man's love to play the laggard."

"Nay then, an that were all, I would set forth at once; I but tarry for that I know not whither the lady be gone."

"Ay, I know, Sir Knight, if you ride to the north it may hap that she hath gone to the west, and if you go east it may be that she hath gone to the north. In sooth, sir, I pity your trouble, for that it be so like mine own."

The outlaw had risen, and was pacing back and forth restlessly. "An you will, Sir Knight, I would tell you somewhat," he said sharply, as though he had come to some sudden decision.

"As you will," returned the knight; "I would not force any man's confidence, and a secret might prove to be but an embarrassing possession; yet if we name names, I would be the first, being a stranger, and you on your own land."

The outlaw laughed. "Nay then, Sir James Blundell, I know you for a true man and honest, or I had not trusted you."

"You know my name!"



"Ay, I know your name—and his—and now to prove my friendship, let me tell you mine."

"Yes, yours—and his," said Sir James, with a look toward the pedlar.

"My father fell by the enmity of the King's favourite——"

"Wolsey!"

"Ay, Wolsey! he fell a victim to the Cardinal's ambition, that could not brook another man beside himself. He perished by the axe, and I, his son, the heir to his great name and good estates, am outlaw by the attainder of——"

"Buckingham!" supplied Sir James.

"Ay, so was he called—but Stafford is my name, for, being attainted, Duke I may not be, nor own the lands my fathers fought for, and kept with strong hands. So am I nothing, who should be called a Duke—yet am I free, free in mine own greenwood, and will be free as long as life shall last, if Heaven aid me."

"Alas! alas! Poor England! how her great names are failing, how her great men are dying, or fighting other Kings' battles—they who won the day for England at Cressy, Poitiers, and Agincourt. Alas! that we should see our country so belittled for the sake of civil strife, as the trivial bickerings of children in a weak man's house."

The outlaw frowned. "Nay, sir, I oftentimes think our country is like to a sorry stepmother with a rod in her hand, who beats, because she has

the habit, her own sons together with the other woman's."

Sir James laughed. "Go to! you are in a bad mood! England is helpless in the hands of a monster."

"That were an unsafe word!"

"In any other company."

"It sometimes haps that walls develop ears. Be wary, Sir James."

The pedlar broke in. "I also have a name. Would know it?"

Sir James looked at him sadly. "Methinks that I could tell it, knowing Buckingham's."

"Not Buckingham; that name were best forgot. I did but tell you, that you might believe me worthy."

"Nay, an you never told, I know you so. What is a name that it should give a man honesty? The man's the thing; the name is but a label—as an apothecary labels his goods. Some are sweet spices, some noxious poisons, some healthful herbs, yet if the label speaks not truly then 'tis worse than useless, being misleading."

The outlaw smiled. "Well, now to business, Sir James. I have despatched riders to the north as far as York, to the south as far as Windsor, to the east as far as Lincoln, and to the west as far as a man may ride over the mountains to the sea."

"For this, much thanks! I pray Heaven bless

you for your honest friendship, and speed the course of two unhappy lovers' wooing. And for yourself, hath love never knocked at your door?"

"A truce to your pleasantries, Sir James! An outlaw's wife would be an outlaw too—scarce a wife at all in law. An Stafford's heir be not a Buckingham, 'twere better for Stafford not to have an heir. Therefore I have held counsel with mine own heart, and in a little space I have resolved to seek that freedom in France that England denies me. There—I know not—but it seems most like that I would hie me to the King, and take service with him, for in truth there be little for an outlaw to live for in this land of ours."

"And your men here in the greenwood?"

"They be well able to forage for themselves, Sir James."

"And for me—you bade me stay with you," said the pedlar.

"Nay, my other father—you must be so, seeing my father took the maid you should have wed—I leave you not, you come with me, is it not so?"

"Nay, I know not. You be not going yet; I'll tell you later."

They sat long silent, while the winter afternoon drew toward dusk and the men heaped up branches upon the dying fire. And when 'twas dark they joined the band and sat in the ruddy glow, telling stories of the chase—and once Sir

James told how he fought in France—and the pedlar seemed to sleep. And when they lay down to rest the outlaw covered the old man tenderly with a skin, and left him. The moon climbed high in the frosty heavens, a dog howled thrice, and the pedlar stirred. The outlaw looked, and came softly to the fire and knelt beside the old man. He opened his eyes once—and smiled—and named the holy Name—and so smiling, died.



## CHAPTER XXV

### HOPE DEFERRED

THE June sun had waked the moor to a new life. In the deep hollows the bluebells trembled daintily on their green stems, and new-born ferns waved gracefully in the breezes that scarcely ever died away. The early morning was sweet and fresh and fragrant, and the murmur of the distant sea formed a low sweet accompaniment for the babbling of the rushing little brook, and the twitterings of birds, and the low hum of the bees as they flew from one flower to another in Alison's garden.

The girl had grown grave of late, and the perplexed little furrow had ploughed itself deeply between her brows. She had taken to wearing sober-hued gowns, and Sir Arthur looked at her —when he could take his thoughts from his books —with some uneasiness. He had ventured to plead Askew's cause once or twice, but before her steady determination to wait for Sir James Blundell, all his arguments had gone to pieces,

and he had settled down to await the passing of events with what patience he might.

Since the night of her coming he had not spoken to her of his studies, and she had not dared to broach the subject, so they had drifted apart again, for he had no other interests, and she could not share his. Thomas Askew came and went with the steady purpose of finding Sir James, or in default, of winning Alison for himself. For he was absolutely honest, and Alison knew that she could trust him to do his utmost for her sake. But the winter had slipped away, and his efforts had been singularly unsuccessful—Sir James would seem to have slipped out of life altogether, and indeed, in these perilous days it would have been scarcely surprising. But in spite of all, Alison had hoped on—though when May had taken Askew to London on her quest, and she felt the loss of his companionship, she began to despair. He had been absent for five weeks, and June had come to the close of its third week, and still he tarried. Would she never know, or would she live on through long years of loneliness waiting for a dead man to come to her? She almost began to fancy that Sir James was really dead, and then she told herself that she was lacking patience, and that all would be well in time, though she was far from feeling the assurance that she proposed to herself.

The sunlight on the hill attracted her, and she

wandered beyond the limits of her little garden, down through the hawthorn avenue to the path that led to Whitby. From thence she could see the Abbey standing grandly grey against the blue sky. She had come to love it as an old friend since Marjorie had gone to live out her fair young life in its silent cloisters. They called her too, sometimes, but that was when she despaired of Sir James coming, and, loving him, could not turn her heart to honest Askew. She strolled idly, scarce noting even the flowers that she loved, or the sparkle of the sun on the sea, and a sudden quick step behind her brought a flush of surprise to her cheeks and made her turn suddenly. Thomas Askew had returned, his face was grave, almost solemn, and his clothes were black. She caught her breath, and her clasped hands went to her heart.

"What be it, Master Askew?" she asked, and there was a gleam of terror in her eyes.

"The Queen!" he said.

"The Queen? The Lady Anne?"

"Ay, the Lady Anne," he said, and his voice faltered; his words failed him. He had seen the hideous thing, and, being a man, had sickened at the sight. How might he tell the Queen's lady—this? "'Twas most piteous," he said, and sighed.

She looked him steadily in the face. "Nay, tell me, Master Askew. Hath aught of ill befallen the Lady Anne?"

"All ill that can befall a woman, Lady Alison. For first they trapped her, then feigned to catch her in her speech, her actions, suborned false witnesses, moved heaven and earth to prove her that, that she was not—I'll be sworn, if 'twas but for her own safety's sake. Being a Queen, she dared not to be false."

"Poor woman!" said Alison sadly; "she reaps the evil that she did the Lady Katharine."

"Nay, lady, blame her not—she is no more."

"How?—no more! Is she dead?"

"Alas! alas! she is."

"How died she?"

"I scarcely dare to tell you, for in the memory of living man, or in the chronicles of England, it was never writ that a woman so perished, and she a Queen."

Alison plucked at his sleeve, for he seemed dazed and almost to have forgotten her presence.

"How died she?" she repeated.

"Lady, I scarce can bear to say what you must hear. She died a sudden and a violent death."

"Murdered?"

"Ay, murdered is the word! Yet not by private malice, nor in secret, but in the public view, and by the sword!"

"By the sword! nay, God be merciful to her, and to us all! These be strange doings in a Christian land."

"And stranger yet to follow. On the day



following the King led another bride to the altar, and she the handmaid of the slaughtered Queen."

"Another bride! Then history but repeats itself, and Katharine be avenged. Hath the King no heart?"

"Pray you be wary. Walls have ears in these days, and woods repeat men's words, and breezes carry men's thoughts. In all England Terror is crowned King and stalks abroad, commanding homage from fearful men."

She trembled. "So the Queen's word is justified; she told the Lady Anne that she should not long survive her, and foretold woe to the lady for whose sake she was cast off."

"And she was not warned?"

"Nay, I think she was blinded to the danger by the dazzle of her goal. Poor Lady Anne! at least she was a good lady to me, and I'll e'en pray for her eternal rest."

"Ay, she went to heaven by a rough road; pray God it was to heaven, for very pity of the lady's death!"

They had walked on over the moor, and Whitby stood before them. In the hollow between the hills that formed the river's banks, the little red-roofed houses nestled close to the slopes and the sea ran up to meet the river that flowed down to it from the moorlands above. High up on the cliff that marked the south bank of the river stood the stately Abbey, looking down, as it

had looked down for centuries, upon the town below. Alison raised her eyes to the venerable pile.

"Marjorie hath chosen well," she said.

"Pray Heaven the turmoil never reach the Abbey!" cried Askew fervently, and Alison looked at him sharply for the meaning that she suspected to underlie his words.

"Nay, then, the Abbey be too great, too old, for—for anyone to harm it!" she cried, and looked round her apprehensively, as if in fear of being overheard.

"History repeats itself, Lady Alison. The Abbey was sacked by the Danes, and the nuns put to the sword. What has been may be again."

"Heaven forbid!"

"Amen! but we live in evil times, and the evil but begins; there's worse to follow. I would, Lady Alison, I knew you safe."

"Heard you aught in London?"

"No, save for a report that I could trace to no distinct origin, that Sir James's foster-brother had been slain in a raid on some Welsh shrine; but I could discover no sequel to the tale, and it seemed but idle gossip, or it might be a garbled version of some other happening. Tales lose naught in the telling, and this tale was right marvellous, how that the dumb man had thundered forth prophecies of evil and smote and killed two men, and so was killed in his turn."

Alison laughed bitterly. "Poor Hubert was dumb," she said. "If he indeed prophesied so, 'twas a miracle that should have struck terror to the hearts of the plunderers. Who was it led the band?"

"Nay, I know naught of that; some said that it was Cromwell's man, an ex-friar of Greenwich—I forget his name; and others said that it was one, Ellis Price, a Welshman in the King's service. Where there be so many tales the truth be hard to sift out of them."

"And Sir James—you heard naught of him? He was not there?"

"That I know not, save that his name was not given as one of the party."

"'Tis odd! If Hubert went alone, then is Sir James dead, or fled from England. Yet if he fled 'twould not be without his foster-brother," she said musingly.

Askew turned from her and walked a little way toward the Abbey. She could see him grinding his heel into the turf as though he would trample his desires under foot, and her heart went out to him in pity, yet could she not help him, for her troth was plighted even had her love not been given to James Blundell. He came back to her after a space, and there was stern purpose in the lines of his lips.

"Lady Alison," he said, "I ask, not for now, but for the future. If I can get no tidings of Sir

James, or he be dead, or hath forgot his troth—then—will you wed me?”

She started away from him, and her clasped hands went to her brow with an imploring gesture. “Ask not the impossible, Master Askew. Listen! I love you not. I esteem you, value your friendship, thank you for your care for me, yet, I could never wed you. I sorrow to pain you, yet sometimes I think the first pain be the least. ’Twere but a coward’s part to let words pass, and smooth out speeches that they should not hurt, and so deceive—a *friend*.” She laid a lingering stress on the last word.

Askew looked at her sadly. “It is your right, Lady Alison, so to speak, mine to hear and obey. I cannot speak, unless I offend further, therefore I will be silent, but, an you need a *friend*, remember Thomas Askew.”

She turned and walked swiftly toward the Hall. He looked after her for a few moments, then, with a sudden resolution, he followed her, keeping her in sight until she had reached her father’s gate. Then he went to his own house.

Alison crept to her chamber, and, flinging herself down, wept the pent-up tears of months—for herself and for James Blundell, and for Thomas Askew, and for the woes of Queen Katharine and the Lady Anne, and for the perilous times and the strange ways of her father, and for the dread that had crept upon her of other sorrows yet to

come. And the beauty of the summer had faded as the sunshine before rain, for the flowers had withered under her feet, and the heavens were overcast, and the sea that had been so calm under the soft breezes was raging and foaming about her. She threw out her hands with a sense of terror and of suffocation, and it was dark, and she lay upon her bed.

She arose and went to the window. It was very still, so that the murmuring sea alone seemed living, and in the east a faint light crept up slowly to a single star, that looked at her reproachfully, as if to say : "Courage and patience, patience and courage!" and she fell upon her knees, knowing that to pray avails more than to weep.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### FRIAR JOHN

STAFFORD and his men were already astir, for the light came early still, and the September mornings were sweet in the greenwood. The outlaw's messengers had returned from the south and east and west, each bringing in a story of evil and oppression that stirred men's hearts against the King's ill deeds, and many times had their hands started to their weapons with a great desire to be up and doing something—anything—if they might but strike a blow for freedom or the relief of the oppressed.

Stafford himself had several times ridden into the forest in search of the northern messenger, but so far he had not found him, and was forced to the conclusion that some evil had befallen him.

But as the days passed and he still tarried, he resolved to go himself, as far as York at any rate, that he might make one more effort to discover what had become of his man. Sir James had pleaded to be allowed to accompany him, but the outlaw

had refused point-blank to suffer him to run any such risk of discovery by the King's creatures, who were pillaging right and left amongst the religious houses and the homes of such of the gentry as had been against him in the matter of the divorce.

And so it happened that his horse had been brought to him, for he had resolved to be early on the road, but he lingered for a few last words with Sir James Blundell, whom he was leaving to fill his place during his absence. The sound as of a man singing came to them on a sudden, and the cracking of branches under the feet of an approaching horse. Then the rider stopped apparently, and a robin called thrice. Stafford took his feet from the stirrup, and stood by his horse with the reins in his hand. The call was repeated and the outlaw put his fingers to his lips to answer it. A merry laugh and the hasty thrusting aside of some heavy undergrowth that hindered the horseman announced the missing man. He came forward quickly, dismounting beside Stafford.

"How now, sirrah! where have you been all this time?" cried the outlaw. "I deemed that you had perished, and was about to ride forth to bury you." He laughed, for the man's appearance was somewhat odd, clothed as he was in flour-sacks.

"I came as soon as I could," he said shortly.

"As soon as you could?"

"Ay, sir. I was taken by a company of the King's men, and clapped into York gaol. They couldn't find anything against me, and I played the fool to fool them, but they took my clothes from me to keep me safely, so I stole these sacks and mine own horse, when they were sleeping after a drinking bout, and before they were awake I had slipped into the forest again."

"And they followed you?"

"Nay, that I know not, sir. I feared that the dust from my fool's dress might betray me, but a thunder shower that chanced washed the road clean again just after I had passed."

"And for your errand?"

"Nay, there I scored; and I have chafed, not to be able to bring in my tidings, for I heard news!"

"News? Nay, hasten, man," cried Sir James.

"The Lady Alison rode north long since—in the frosty weather that chanced last October. She rode with one Master Thomas Askew and his sister—as sweet a maid as the sun ever shone upon—and the party rode to York. I rode with them for two nights and two days, and at York I turned back hot-foot to bring my message home, but the King's men took me. I'll be even with them some day."

"To York! and thence?"

"To Whitby. So said Master Askew—a civil spoken gentleman, and head over heels in love with the Lady Alison."



"I pray you speak more respectfully of the lady, sirrah!" said Sir James hotly.

The man flushed. "Nay, sir, I meant no offence. The Lady Alison be of so sweet a presence that a man were scarce a man if he rode with her and fell not a prisoner to her charms."

"Enough, man! Stafford, I leave you here. I must go forward now. You'll not forbid me longer?"

The outlaw smiled. "Nay, but we'll ride with you, and it may be the safest plan to devise some order of march, so as to leave naught to chance. 'Twere safest for you not to ride to York, but to keep the western road that crosses Marston Moor and the Ouse, and thence northward to Northallerton, and so east by the moor to Whitby."

"So I shall pass by mine own house. I trow it lies in ruins by now, for 'tis many years since my father dwelt there, and I have not been there since I was a boy."

"'Twould be as well to look at it in passing, Sir James, for a man must needs have a home when he weds a wife, and the wedding be not far off now."

"Well, let's away. Each moment seems an hour while the Lady Alison waits."

The outlaw's haunt was speedily a scene of bustle and preparations for the journey. The returned messenger was quickly supplied with more suitable attire, one man contributing one

garment and another another, until he was completely outfitted. He and a select few of the band were to be left behind to guard the camp—not a little to his disgust, for he would have made one of the party ; but Stafford was firm in his refusal.

“ You may be known in York,” he said, “ and ’twere better not to invite difficulties, seeing that our chief object is to put Sir James safely into the right road. We go no farther than the borders of the Forest by York.”

It was noon when they set forth, taking the woodland path, for they wished not to encounter any of the King’s men. At night they halted, but they made no fire for greater safety, but tethered the horses to a tree, and sat about it while they supped on the provisions they had brought. A step on the path silenced them, and they watched for the traveller to appear, for that he was alone they could very well distinguish. Stafford rose to meet him as he came to the place they had selected for their resting-place, and brought into the company—a friar !

The Friar looked at them suspiciously. “ You be Cromwell’s men ? ” he asked, and straightened himself somewhat, for though he was fearful he was not desirous that they should know it.

“ Nay, reverend Father ! I be an outlaw at home in the forest, and some of these be my men, and one a stranger knight who rides with me for safety.”

The Friar looked searchingly at the outlaw, and then his glance fell upon Sir James, and he started but he said nothing, and Sir James spoke. "Take, your ease, reverend Father; these be good men, and true sons of Mother Church, and you be as safe here as in your Friary at Greenwich."

The Friar made a sign of caution to the knight. "Who said Greenwich?" he said. "I named no place."

"Nay, but I know you, Friar John. Tell us the news. What has chanced since Christmas?"

With an anxious glance around him the Friar seated himself. "Since Christmas? Christmas be a long time since, and many things have happed since then. The Queen be dead."

"Ay, we heard of that."

"The Lady Anne be dead too—by the sword—last May. Father Forrest, whom the King liberated with his own hand in January, was taken again and thrown into a dark cell in Newgate with the promise of a speedy and painful death."

"Ah!" cried the outlaw, and he kicked fiercely at the tree against which he was standing, "these be evil times—and evil deeds follow one another like hailstones in a thunder-shower. Is there no hope for Father Forrest?"

"Nay, he preached against the King's new marriage with the Lady Anne, and openly and boldly, to the King's face, but the King took it

patiently, and the following Sunday Dr. Kerwin preached, and he praised the King for that what he had done was blameless, and Father Peto rose in his place and rated the preacher soundly, and likened the King to Achab and the Queen to Jezabel to their faces, and his eyes were stern, so that no man durst lay his hand upon him, and he prophesied—‘ Even as the dogs licked the blood of Achab, so shall they lick thy blood, O King, unless thou turn thyself from the evil way.’”

Sir James had risen to his feet. “ I would I had been there !” he cried. “ ’Twas a brave speech and a true. What said the King ?”

“ Nay, he said naught for that time, but the week following, Father Forrest was seized at Greyfriars in Smithfield, where he had tarried since the King had liberated him, and Fathers Peto and Abell and Elstow were again taken too—but we know not whither.”

“ And you ? How come you here ?”

“ Master Cromwell came to us then, and questioned us concerning the divorce, and the marriage that the King had contracted with the Lady Anne, and other divers matters, and after taking an inventory of all our possessions—which indeed were not great, save for the church ornaments—he sent us all forth, and sealed the doors with the King’s seal.”

“ And you are homeless ?”

“ Ay, I go to a house of the Observance in

Scotland, where I hope to end my days in peace, for there be no more peace in England."

"Heard you aught of Robert Lyst?"

"He be at Cambridge now—a clerk in minor orders. He was one time a friar amongst us."

"So? He be at Cambridge? Was he in Cromwell's pay?"

"Nay, that I knew not certainly, but that he left Greenwich somewhat suddenly, being porter at the Friary at the time, and not destined for the priesthood. There was some little stir at the moment, but nothing that I can tell you with certainty."

"It is said that he visited many of the lesser religious houses for Cromwell, and raided a shrine in Wales, in company with a Welshman named Price. I would I knew the rights of the story," said the outlaw.

The Friar shook his head. "Nay, of that I know nothing," he said, "but there was a story that Cromwell had fooled his man. He had brought a gem of price, it seems, from some such place, and sent it by Cromwell's hand to the Lady Anne, but the wily minister presented it as his own gift, and Lyst lost the credit of his offering."

Sir James laughed. "He was well served!" he cried. "When a young fox hunts with an old one, he must look to be snared—and he leaned on a broken reed when he sought the favour of the Lady Anne."

"Ay, poor woman! she was blameworthy, yet the manner of her taking was a horror to all England—and I believe not one tithe of all that was sworn against her was true. The King be wed again—and to the late Queen's lady."

"Ay, we heard it," said Sir James. "God grant the new Queen a happier fate—at least, she is true wife to the King."

The Friar sighed. "God grant relief to his persecuted Church," he said gravely; "there be reports of ill-doings from all parts of the country—religious houses sacked and emptied of their inmates, who asked for nothing but to pass their days usefully and peaceably in the service of God; churches plundered to fill the pockets of the King's creatures; life itself not safe when men like Father Forrest lie under sentence of death for the mere expression of their opinions; and the sword drips with the blood of a woman—who was at least not the thing they tried to make her. Nay, there be corruption in the courts—ay, even in the Church, where the King's creatures are intruded into benefices; and the weak are frightened into crimes that they would not have dared, save for the fear of death. For one who stands, twenty fall victims to this human monster who apes sanctity and works blithely for his master, the devil. Nay, he would even usurp the authority of our Lord the Pope."

"Of the Pope!" cried the outlaw and Sir James

in a breath, and the men of the band drew nearer to listen to the Friar's words.

"Ay, for he has had himself proclaimed supreme lord and head of the Church, and so it chanceth that the men of the new learning be burned at the stake for heresy, and other men who profess the Catholic Faith are hanged as traitors at the same time. There be no living in this country any more, save for the King's creatures."

"And for the rest of the friars? How fared they?"

"Some be thrown into prison, some be banished, but few escaped. I had orders to hie me with all speed to Scotland under pain of death if I be found south of the Tweed after Michaelmas, therefore I hasten, having no means to travel otherwise than afoot."

"Then you shall ride with us, reverend Father!" cried the outlaw, "an we furnish you with a horse; I doubt not that the good knight here will accompany you as far as Northallerton, and thence the way to the border will be neither long nor difficult, for once past the Tees you will meet with but few of the King's men. They like not the sturdy men of the north, who are wont to fight for their own. An you fare in safety to Scotland, pray you forget us not in your orisons."

"That will I not, sir; and thanks to you for your charity."

The night had already fallen, and they turned

to rest, but first Sir James took the hand of Derfel Gadarn from his saddle-bow, where it had rested since he rode from Llanderfel, and showed it to the Friar.

"There be a prophecy anent the image from which that hand was severed," he said.

"Prophecies must be fulfilled," said the Friar stoutly; "when men make them in all seeming impossible of fulfilment, you may expect to see them shortly come to pass."

"The image was destroyed and carted to London, reverend Father," protested Sir James.

"An it has reached there, the prophecy will still be fulfilled; doubt it not, or it be no true prophecy." He ceased speaking, and a star shot suddenly across the sky, leaving a long trail of light behind it for a few seconds. The Friar crossed himself devoutly. "A soul has gone to heaven," he said; "may we follow it when our time comes."

They lay down to rest under the tree, but Sir James was careful to place the hand of Derfel Gadarn at his head, and he invoked the Strong Champion for his friends, and for his own perils, and for Alison, that he might come safely to her—and soon. And the others slept, but he lay looking up into the sky, marvelling at the wonder of the midnight heavens, until he, too, fell asleep.

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## CHAPTER XXVII

### PERFECT LOVE

FATHER FORREST lay uneasily on the stone bench of his narrow cell. It was somewhat too short for his stature, but the discomfort of his posture was partly compensated for by his being able to keep his feet from the earthen floor. It was night. He knew that it was so, for the tiny point of light that shone through the keyhole had faded long ago, and the occasional footsteps of passing gaolers and the sound of their harsh rough voices had ceased. The cries of a tortured prisoner in the next cell to his had ceased too, and the Friar's lips moved in prayer for the unhappy man.

He had lost count of the days in the perpetual gloom, and the months since his reimprisonment appeared years to him. The darkness and solitude had told upon him, and the sounds of fearful anguish that broke the tomb-like silence from time to time roused him to mental rebellion against the diabolical cruelty of the King's creatures. He scarcely credited Henry himself with sanctioning

many of the things that were done in his name, still less would he have believed that the King himself had been present when certain inmates of the surrounding cells had been put to the torture in the hope of extracting accusations from them that would bring other men to suffer, not in their places, but side by side with them. Death seemed to him but a desirable relief from such an existence—even the fiery ordeal that had been promised to him. Nevertheless, fear was his most terrible suffering, and as the long dark hours passed slowly by him, a weaker man would have succumbed.

The silence grew more profound, and he judged that it was about midnight. The memory of his happy days at Greenwich recurred to him, and the thought of the midnight office in the Friary church came to him as a soothing memory. He recalled the dark restful shadows of the sanctuary, the little lights that the friars carried to the office, and the strange shadows that they made on the walls and the pillars. He could almost hear the sound of the chanting as the office proceeded. The familiar psalms fell from his lips. He forgot his prison, the hard bench on which he lay all huddled together in his attempt to escape a little from the rats. He forgot the darkness, the isolation, the suffering, for a little while; he remembered only that he was one of the grey habited friars in the Friary church. Long years' use had made a great

part of the office so familiar to him that he could recite it almost entirely without a book to aid his memory. The lauds came strangely from his lips. Surely never more precious psalms of praise fell from any man's lips. He was scarcely conscious of the seeming incongruity of the prayers of praise, and he went through them as well as he could by memory alone. The last words of the *Salve Regina* found him still unconscious of his surroundings, lost in a sort of dream.

It seemed to him that he was a young man again on the verge of life. He could see the companions of his youth. Some had passed away, and with a sort of dual consciousness he rejoiced that they had been taken away before the troubles came ; but he seemed to be still amongst them, and one of them held him by the hand and led him through an open door into the chapter-room of the Friary at Greenwich. He could hear the tolling of the great bell, and see silent friars filing into their places. Amongst them he recognized many whom he had known in his forty years of religious life, and some who had died even many years since. But nothing surprised him, though when he had come to the chapter-room he had seen that the door was sealed, and that the silent friars were passing through it into the space beyond. Without conscious effort on his part he had followed them and found himself standing in his old place near the door, that had been his as a

young man. The Warden's seat was in shadow, or rather enveloped in a sort of mist, so that he could not see that end of the long room at all. He waited, for still the dead friars came on in a long procession, nearly all men whom he knew to be dead, but there were some whom he had known as living a few weeks ago. He scarcely wondered at their presence ; it did not strike him as strange.

The long line of friars came to an end at last, and the mist at the far end of the room became softly luminous. He realized for the first time that the friars held no candles in their hands, and became aware of a soft radiance that shone about each cowed figure, seeming to emanate from it. The mist grew less dense, and from its depths a figure stood out, dimly at first—as a man seen at a distance in a fog—then more clearly, until at last he recognized the form of Derfel the Strong. The gigantic figure grew more clearly defined the longer he looked upon him, until he stood forth in all the might and glory that he remembered of him on the night of St. Stephen. The bright armour glistened in a radiance that seemed to come from within it rather than to be reflected upon it from without, and the smile that he remembered played over the lips of Derfel, and he raised his right hand as if to beckon him. Scarcely realizing what he did, the Friar went forward slowly, and kneeled at the feet of the

radiant figure. The mist gathered about him again, and he became conscious of other beings whom he understood rather than saw with his bodily eyes, and Derfel touched his heart, and fear fled from him, so that his limbs trembled no more, and he looked upward with untroubled brow. And the Strong Champion touched his eyes, and lo! they looked upon a vast army of warriors with a great Archangel carrying a banner, and two lesser Angels who bore a box of alabaster with three compartments in it. And all the spirits sang—but the words he understood not, for they sang in a strange tongue, yet the burden of their song he comprehended, and knew that they were bidding him go forward fearlessly, for that the end was sure. And his soul was wrapt in peace and joy and love immeasurable, that steeled him against suffering and pain and weariness till his old heart beat with the fire of youth, and weakness left his body, and his eyes shone again with the fire of early manhood.

Then spoke the Champion : “ Thus shalt thou be anointed with the oil of strength,” and opening the box of alabaster, he dipped his thumb therein, and the Friar perceived a sweet odour, and Derfel anointed his head and his shoulders and his heart, and the spirits sang “ Amen !”

“ And with the oil of joy.” He dipped his thumb into another compartment of the alabaster box, and another sweet odour issued from it as he

touched the Friar's head and heart. And he felt his soul, as it were, leave his body and join itself to the vast choir of mighty spirits, and his "Amen!" was joined to theirs, and lost itself as a drop in the ocean of their prayers. But the Champion had dipped his thumb into the third compartment of the alabaster box, and his face glowed yet more radiantly as he bent to the kneeling Friar.

"Be thou anointed with the oil of perfect love," he said, and signed his brow, and the perfume of that anointing was like unto incense, and he heard not the chorused "Amen!" of the spirits, for his soul was filled with perfect love, so that he had forgotten all things. And thus he knelt for a space, and the spirits worshipped in silence, not presuming to speak to a soul whom God held in His Hand. But after a while, when the Friar raised his head again, lo! Derfel Gadarn looked upon him, and his eyes beamed fellowship and benignity, and his hand went to his side, and he drew his sword, and the blade flashed like the flashing of sunlight on the sea, and he laid it on the Friar's shoulder, and bade him rise, for that he was a new-made knight. And he called for a sword, and a spirit brought him one, and he girded it about the Friar, and hung a breastplate about his neck, and delivered a shield that was blazoned with a cross into his hand. His head also he covered with a strong helmet, and, for his

friar's sandals, gave him goodly shoes of leather. And the company of spirits burst forth into a song of battle that fired his spirit and confirmed his resolution; but when it died away the Champion spoke again.

“Go forth, Christain knight!” he said, and the Friar thrilled to his words. “Go forth to the fight. The end is not yet—but it is sure. Look upward, thou wilt not go alone to the strife,” and the Friar fixed his eyes on the eyes of Derfel the Strong, and knew him for his friend, so that impulsively he put forth his hand and touched the hand of Derfel, and the Champion smiled again.

“Lo! I, Derfel the Strong, will be with thee in the day of battle and in the hour of strife; and thine arm shall not fail nor thy courage falter, for thy battle is the battle of the Lord of Hosts. And when thou shalt have prevailed, thou shalt go to Him gloriously with praise and honour, and I and these spirits will attend thee, and bear thee up to the throne of God. And fear not that He will fail thee, for ‘He is faithful to reward.’”

And Derfel bent toward the Friar and gave him the kiss of peace, and the spirits did in like manner. But the Friars came last, moving silently from their places, and saluting him one by one as their brother, the anointed champion of the cause of God. And his heart was stirred within him, so that he could not speak, and the tears fell from his eyes, and he awoke.

The point of light that came through the key-hole told him that it was day, and he rose and kneeled down to pray. The terror and foreboding had all left him, but he knew that he was mortal still, and with the memory of the Champion's assurances upon him he prayed that his arm might not fail, nor his heart be afraid in the coming conflict.

The door opened suddenly. In the absorption of his spirit he had not heard the footsteps of the gaoler, and he rose quickly at the sound. The man who entered had a lantern in his hand, and he set down a pitcher of water and a loaf of bread, but instead of turning away, as was his wont, he waited—perhaps for the fraction of a moment. The Friar looked at him wonderingly, for it was borne in upon him that he was about to speak, and the thought came to him that this day might be the day of his combat, but the man only said :

“The Lady Anne be doomed to die—by the sword of the headsman—and she would that you would pray for her, Father Forrest.” His voice faltered a little, and the Friar wondered at the man's emotion.

“The Lady Anne !” he exclaimed. “Nay then, pray you tell her that I will not fail to pray most earnestly for her, seeing that her need be so urgent. When dies she ?”

“To-morrow morn,” said the man, and he turned away his eyes, ashamed for the tears that shone in them.



“Nay then, bid her be of good hope, for that the way to Heaven be often rough, but that, an we get there safely, all will be forgot.”

“I look not to be able to give your message, Father Forrest,” said the man; “but there be a messenger leaving for the Tower in an hour’s time, and I will endeavour to have speech with him.”

“Ay, to do so will be a Christian act, for even the least word of comfort may soothe the passage of a soul. And her passage will be rough, albeit in her life she fared daintily.”

The man murmured a reply, and went from the Friar’s presence swiftly, but Forrest noted that he shut the door gently, as he was not wont to do, and drew the bolt softly, as though he closed a holy place. And in the darkness Friar Forrest fell upon his knees again, and prayed earnestly for the soul of the poor woman whose passing was so near and so appalling, and for the King who sent her to her doom, if haply he might be brought to a better mind. But over his prayer lay the promise of Derfel Gadarn, like a mantle, shielding him from the shafts of the enemy, for his soul was at peace, and perfect love for God and man rejoiced his heart.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII

“ I BELIEVE HE BE DEAD ”

“ NAY, Master Askew, my father be from home. Word came to him three days since by a mounted messenger, and he went with him to York. He spoke no word, save only: ‘ Have your horse saddled, Alison, for I must to York with all speed.’ And so he made ready and departed. ’Tis long since he rode, and of late he hath not even kept a horse for his use, seeing that he never needed one.”

Thomas Askew tapped with the handle of his riding-whip on the gate that was closed between them, for he had surprised Alison at work amongst the flowers and the sweet-scented herbs in her garden. For a moment he stood silently, then, as he raised his eyes to the moor behind, he knew that he must say that which he had come to say as speedily as might be. His eyes dwelt for an instant on the girl’s face. She had come to calmness through the anxiety of the years, and it bore the stamp of a great patience and a great strength.

"I would go with you into the house," he said.

She looked her surprise, but read a fixed purpose in his eyes, and undid the latch, suffering him to join her on the other side.

"What?" she asked uneasily, and her glance questioned him anxiously.

"Your father," he said unsteadily; and fear leaped into her eyes.

"Ay! what of my father?" she asked, and followed the direction of his glance, and saw nothing, for the figures that were coming slowly—so slowly, so carefully—across the moor were near at hand now, and the thick holly bushes hid them from her and from Askew.

He realized it, and laid his hand on her arm "Come into the house, Lady Alison," he said, so masterfully that she obeyed quite simply like a little child, and led the way into the Hall, with its big open fireplace, and the trophies of the chase hung about the walls.

"Well?" she said, as she faced him again. "What news, Master Askew? What hath befallen my father?"

"He—he—be—coming, Lady Alison! There was an accident belike, but he was found by some of my men lying on the moor."

"Ay!" she said, and her voice was hard with the constraint that she put upon herself.

"Lady Alison, he was dead—quite dead—and his horse was gone."

She looked at him, as if not comprehending his words. "How foolish!" she said, and her words startled him. "The horse would have come home. Who told you the tale, Master Askew?—you frightened me somewhat. Yet I believe you meant it kindly, for you are always kind."

The tramp of feet broke on the silence that succeeded her words, for Askew could find no words to answer her. She looked up at him quickly, and her colour rose as she went forward to the door. Two men stood without, bearing the body of her father on a hastily contrived litter of branches, and none of them durst look upon her face, but Askew motioned to them to enter, and then he drew the girl aside, and gave her into the care of the maid who had attended her since she had left the house of the Duchess of Norfolk. And silence fell upon the lonely Hall, where the master lay dead in the long low room that had been both library and study. Ay, dead!

When some hours later Alison stole into the room and closed the door, nothing chanced to mar the stillness of the place, for her grief was tearless as yet. The suddenness of the blow had stunned her for the time. For long she knelt by the dead man's side, and looked upon his face, and marvelled at its serenity. For it was as though death had struck him from behind, and he had not realized its approach. It was there that Thomas Askew found her when he came again to the

Hall. He could not keep away from her while her need was so urgent. He entered the room hurriedly and came to her side, crossed himself devoutly, and knelt in prayer for the departed. A little shudder ran through her, and her breath came with a sob, for the commonplace attitude of the man had forced her to recognize the reality of what had happened. A little cry escaped her.

"Father!" and Askew's hand went out to meet hers, she standing, he kneeling still by the silent form.

"He died easily." It was the only thing that he could find to say, and he knew that as yet Alison had not realized her own pain.

"Nay, I could wish that he had passed otherwise, Master Askew," she said. "I be affrighted at the suddenness of his taking."

The hand that he still held in both of his trembled, but he could find no word of consolation for her just then, and when he raised his eyes he saw hers tearless and very bright.

"Nay then," he said soothingly, "he lived a blameless life; he injured none; may he rest in peace."

"Amen!" she strove to say, but her lips trembled on the word, and the tears sprang to her eyes.

Askew rose to his feet. "Lady Alison," he said, "have you no kin in all England?"

"Nay, I know not, Master Askew, for as long

as I can remember we have lived alone, and my father's sister died two years since. Alas, alas! and woe is me! The Queen is dead; the Lady Anne hath perished; Father Forrest, who used to be my friend, hath incurred the enmity of the King, and lieth even now under sentence of death. God be merciful, for I have no one left, Master Askew!"

"Then suffer me to be as a brother to you for a little space, Lady Alison. We must render the last offices to your father, and being alone you would find it very hard. Trust to me to order it for you, and go you to your chamber for a while."

She looked up at him, but tears were in her eyes and choked her speech, and he led her to the door and closed it after her, and turned back again to the dead man's side. His first care was to cover the old man's face reverently, and then he gathered together the papers that lay in some confusion on the table, made them into a package and sealed them with his own seal. Then he locked the open press, wherein were stored other papers and legal-looking documents, and sealed that in a like manner. So, all being safe he went forth again, and called for the housekeeper, who had been Alison's nurse, and told her what he had done, and that they should look to him for orders seeing that Alison had no kindred. The old woman answered him readily, for he was a goodly man to look upon, and she hoped to see him wed

to Alison. But the girl sat in her own chamber scarce weeping or feeling at all, only knowing that she was left alone desolate, a woman with none of her kindred about her in the hour of her greatest need. And it was borne in upon her that Sir James Blundell was certainly dead, or that he would have come to her in this hour.

On the third day they buried the earthly remains of Sir Arthur Ward in the moor, with solemn dirge and requiem, and Alison stood by the open grave with tearless eyes, and a great hard despair in her young face. She knelt for a while after the others had gone, but when she rose, she found Thomas Askew waiting to conduct her to the Hall.

"There be something I want to say to you," he said; "may I come in the morning?"

She bowed her head gravely. "Ay, you may come," she said, with despair in her voice.

He wondered, but spoke not, and at her own gate he left her, judging that she would be better by herself.

The August day dawned over the moor with a flush of crimson that seemed like blood. Alison stood in her garden, a doleful figure in heavy mourning garments, and strained her eyes to catch the glimpse of the sea between the hills that she loved so well. The red glory already enveloped the Abbey, and she longed with all her heart that she might end her days in its peaceful cloisters, that she might forget life with its tortur-

ing doubts and fears, and find peace. But reverence restrained her, for she knew that if Sir James Blundell had not failed her, she would have been his wife, and she would not devote that to Heaven which had first been offered to earth, besides which even cloisters were not safe in these days, and there was a rumour of a proposed visitation of the Abbey, which had exercised Thomas Askew of late and made him anxious for Marjorie. A step roused her from her turmoil of thought, and she turned to see Askew coming towards her. She opened the gate, and went to meet him soberly enough down the avenue of hawthorn trees. He saw her coming, and despite her sadness his heart leaped with the sudden joy that came to him ; her coming to him in her need ; her need of him—of his help. He approached her very gently, very reverently, and raised the hand she gave him to his lips. They wandered down the avenue, for he had turned to walk with her, and across the little stream by two or three cottages and an inn, and so to the open moor.

The flush of the sunrise was on their faces as they stood watching the great crimson globe creep steadily upward, until the warm red light flashed over the browned grass and kissed the little ferns, turning them to gold, and the red berries on the brambles that would be black ere the moon had completed its round. And the man held his breath for awe at the suffering in the girl's eyes.



He had come to plead her own cause with her ; for the moment he had well-nigh forgot that what he asked of her was what he desired for himself more than anything in the world beside. He knew her need of the protection that his name would give her, otherwise he had not spoken then. They had come to the cliff, and stood looking down upon the rugged little bay at their feet, where the white waters surged and boiled around great grey pinnacles of rock upon which the sea-gulls perched lying in wait for some unwary fish. A brown-sailed fishing-boat put out to sea from the beach below.

"Look !" he cried, "they venture out into the deep, yet, for all the treachery of the sea, for all the storms they may encounter, they go hopefully. Hark to their cries ! Ah ! now they salute the Abbey."

She shivered a little and shrank closer to him. "'Tis like life," she said. "A great peril, a great strife, and then death that brings peace at the last."

"Ay," he said slowly, "death will bring peace, at the last ; but in the meantime, Lady Alison ?"

She looked at him. "Ay?" she said. "Meantime—what mean you?"

"In the meantime—while the strife waxeth fierce—a maid hath need of a strong arm to guard her."

She sighed, then flushed crimson. He waited just a moment.

"If—if you judge that—that my betrothed is dead," she faltered.

He took her hand, a great sorrow and a great longing in his eyes. "Before God, I do believe he be dead," he said solemnly. "Lady Alison, will you accept the safety that my name and home will give you?"

She looked for one moment to the foaming waters below, then swiftly to the sunlit moor. Her hand went to her heart, as if to still its longing for her betrothed. "If he comes not in a month, I will wed you, Master Askew," she said, and turned suddenly from him.

He watched her as she sped away from him over the moor. He had her promise at last. He had scarcely expected her to yield, and her consent had come to him like a blow. For a moment his sorrow at her suffering urged him to follow her and give her back her word, but he restrained the impulse.

"Hardly won is fairly won," he told himself, and turned with springing steps to go to his home, that he might begin to prepare it for its new mistress.

\* \* \* \* \*

## CHAPTER XXIX

### DAWN

THE wind swept up from the sea. It howled amongst the rocks in the bay and whistled in the hollow caves that honeycombed the cliffs. At Hawsker the tough old thorn-trees swayed to its violence, as they had swayed to the violence of a hundred such September gales and never been broken in the strife, for their twisted roots held the soil widely and deeply in long, far-reaching fingers, and the holly-bushes, ill-kempt with their summer growth, and already bedecked with gold or scarlet berries, tapped against the windows of the silent Hall with an invitation to fare forth to the wild play of the elements.

It was still early, and no one was yet astir save Alison, who sat by her window, as she had sat all through the whole of that night, watching the mysteries of the heavens and the approach of dawn. The clouds scudded swiftly across the dark silent spaces of the sky, whence here and there a frightened star dared to look forth upon an evil world. Even the silver linings of the

clouds were wanting, for there was no moon, and the voices of the wind were eloquent of storm and stress and passion. Alison sat on in a kind of dull misery, rebelling against Fate. On a table in the room lay a white gown ; her eyes rested on it for a moment and she shuddered. It was her bridal dress, and this was her wedding morn !

The grey light drifted into the room from behind the grey clouds, and she felt that she could bear it no longer. The tapping of the branches against her window roused her to action, and she wrapped a heavy hooded cloak about her, and slipped silently from the sleeping house to the garden, and thence to the moor beyond. She breathed more freely then. There was a sense of wild freedom on the windy moor, voiced by the storm-driven, screaming gulls that circled overhead.

It was the last day on which she might think of her betrothed—the last time that she might breathe his name as she did then : “ James ! James ! come to me—come to me *now*—before it is too late ! ”

She pictured him riding over the moor in time to see her wedded to the honest man who could no longer efface himself for her, and with the mental vision came a conviction that he still lived—that somewhere he moved and breathed—and loved her still. Nothing could unsettle that last conviction ; it was part of herself ; she *knew* it, as one sometimes knows things that are beyond one’s

natural means of knowledge. Out there on the moor, with the winds blowing about her and the murmur of the distant breakers in the bay below, she felt a sense of nearness to him, of companionship, that overpowered her.

The memory of what she was to do that day came to her with the suddenness of a blow, and she felt that she could not say the words that would make her Askew's wife. Then, with a strong, stern effort she put the thought from her, and strove to murmur his name with the intonation that a wife would give to it. Thomas was such a hard name to say somehow, for it meant nothing to her. She respected him, esteemed him—ay, loved him in a measure, as a friend—but beside the love she bore for James Blundell this other love paled, as the morning star fades before the glory of the dawn.

The last morning of her freedom! Ay, she was free still, for a little space, and she would use the last of that glorious gift to the end. She would use her maiden privilege of weeping for her lost love, she told herself, and went onward blindly, called by the booming of the distant sea, called by the circling gulls that flew so near to her as almost to touch her with their wings, called by the restless impulse of her own tortured heart. She walked quickly until she came to the cliffs. The grey sea lay before her in all the bravery of its white foam and spray that wrapped the rocks in a

misty veil. She shuddered as she looked at it ; it reminded her of the white veil of a bride, and she was not that—not yet ! She thrust the memory of what was to be more vehemently from her as the time approached more nearly.

From the northern cliffs the stately Abbey rose silent and still, a type of peace in a storm-tossed world. Alison's hands went out towards it in an intense appeal. If only she might have sought shelter within its hallowed precincts ! If only her feet might have paced its silent cloisters ! If only her voice might have mingled with the holy songs in its ancient choir—so that she kept her freedom !

If Sir James came not—and the month that she had exacted was already overpast—if he were indeed dead, and it seemed that it must be so, she might have lived a tranquil, peaceful life with the hope of going to him at the last, but this wedding of another was a horror, a desecration. Her half unconscious appeal wrung no reply from the voice of Fate. The wind had torn the hood of her cloak from her head, and as she kneeled in the extremity of her anguish her long hair became loosened and streamed about her like a dark veil tossed in the wind. The wind dropped a little and sank to a sort of moaning wail—a kind of sobbing in a minor key—and the fresh drops that are the tears of heaven fell softly upon her. The contact soothed her, as the touch of something holy will ease the throb of passion, and tears came to her hot eyes :

she wept. Her knowledge of outer things was dead for the time, she only knew that life was over for her, that she was to be buried that day in a living grave of forgetfulness, and a feeble petition for mercy streamed upward from her broken heart. Something seemed to snap within her, and she wondered for a moment if she could bear much more and live, but the wind came at her again shrieking and howling, and the tears of heaven ceased to flow, and she rose up.

"Dear God!" she cried; "dear God, pity me. To-day my heart is dead, and I come to bury it. Here, in the shadow of the Abbey, will I plunge it deep into the moor, for it is dead! It can never live again—good-bye, my heart, good-bye!" she said, and laughed wildly, and flung her wet hair from her face, and turned from the sea to retrace her steps—for the day had fairly dawned—it was nearly time to deck the victim for the sacrifice.

As she crested the last hill that rose between the cliffs and the Hall, her courage failed her again, and she sank to the cold damp ground in an agony of weeping. She was unconscious of all now, save the aching void at her heart, and in a lesser degree, of the burning of her eyes. She rose at last dully, and walked forward slowly and unsteadily towards her home, seeing nothing for her tear-dimmed eyes. With a sudden shock she saw the Hall before her, and realized her condition, and

with a grim resolution gathered her hair into her hood and covered her head.

A horseman rose up against the sky—a tall man on a great black charger—and he came riding gallantly. Alison saw him, and her heart stood still, for he came from the direction of Master Askew's house, and she feared that the hour of her bridal had come already—but she waited, with her hand on the gate.

The stranger came more slowly now, with downcast eyes, picking his charger's way carefully over the wet moor. She could have cried aloud at his slowness, for now that the hour had come, she would have rushed on her fate—if only to have it settled once for all. She gave one last, long, hungry glance to the free open moor—to the grey sky with its hurrying clouds—to the dripping hollies that clustered about the old Hall—to the sodden turf in which her feet were sunk. . . . And then—with a binding flash of light—the day dawned! rosy and warm, instinct with light, and life, and colour, and movement, and she flung her arms outward and upward.

"James!" she cried, "James Blundell!" and he drew rein, and sprang to the earth, and caught her in his arms all dripping with rain, and wind-blown, and shivering, and flushing, with happy tears falling over her pale cheeks that washed away the despair and the terror of her morning vigil at the gates of the sea.



They spoke but little, for a great wonder and a great joy silenced them, and all their lives lay before them for speech. Only he carried her tenderly up the garden path, and across the threshold of her home—and she remembered her words to her dead father, and smiled gently that they should have proved true.

\* \* \* \* \*

## CHAPTER XXX

“ TO-MORROW !”

“ LADY ALISON,” he said, when she came to him again, with her face all rosy with the flush of love, and the soft light that he remembered of old in her eyes, “ I nearly came too late.”

She looked at him. “ Who told you, James ?” She lingered a little on the name as a woman lingers on a name she loves.

He bent towards her. “ ’Twas Thomas Askew, sweetheart—the very honestest man I ever met—I trow his honesty hath cost him the only treasure that he coveteth.”

“ He hath stood by me ever since I came North, James. When my—my father died, there seemed no other way.”

Sir James smiled. “ Nay, there *was* no other way, sweetheart ; an you had wed him, I could not but have approved—e’en though I had been the loser.”

She smiled up at him. “ So, you be not angry, James ?”

“ And wherefore ? Nay, Lady Alison, ’twas a

guardianship of Heaven's own making for a hapless maid. And now I would tell you somewhat. My house lies in ruins, my estates be laid waste, the King be mine enemy who would clap me in prison an he had the chance—would you still be my Lady Blundell?”

“Ay, James, naught can alter that,” she said, and twisted the ring on her finger.

“When shall we be wed?” he asked her. “For an the wedding be over, we must away to Antwerp. There I shall join a comrade of my wanderings in the forest—a friend who was the means whereby I found you, sweetheart. As for the estates, an the King seize them not, no other can take them, and they must e'en wait the tide of fortune. Say, shall it be so, sweetheart? Shall we fare forth in search of what may chance till better times?”

She turned her eyes to meet his. “As you will, James. I wed not to think for myself any more.”

He laughed. “So you be contented, Lady Alison?”

“Ay, I be content.”

“When shall we wed?” he asked her again.

“When you will,” she answered softly, and there was a quiet happiness in her voice that contented him.

“Then it shall be to-morrow, Lady Alison. I would not be wed to-day, for haply it might hurt

Thomas Askew ; this was his day—let it rest ; to-morrow shall be ours, an it please you, sweetheart."

"Ay, it pleases me, James," she said, and they fell to talking, and he told her of the long months that he had passed in the forest with Stafford—and of Hubert's death.

"Poor Hubert!" she said, and there was a wealth of pity in her tones. "So he is at rest!"

"Ay, sweetheart, and many a one besides." He told her of the hand of Derfel, and of all that had befallen him at the shrine, and of the prophecy.

"I would see the hand," she said at last, and he rose and brought it to her.

She looked at it long, and upon the dark stains upon it. "Poor Hubert!" she said again, and turned to him once more. "Poor Master Askew!" she said after a pause ; "he hath suffered sorely through me."

"Not by your fault, sweetheart."

"Nay, by my misfortune. He be a man, James," she said exultingly, "a man I be proud to have had love me."

They sat by the fire of blazing logs and forgot the moaning of the wind and the pelting of the rain. It beat upon a horseman who rode towards them from the Hollies. He threw himself from the saddle at the gate, and they heard not his footsteps on the path, but after he had knocked

loudly, he tarried not, but came in to them boldly. Alison rose with a little cry.

“Lady Alison,” he said, “’tis no more than my right to bring you a gift—I pray you accept this.” His voice broke a little, for it was the gift he had designed for his bride. He drew nearer to her as he spoke, and threw a string of pearls about her throat, and clasped it with a little gasp as if the action hurt him. Then, as she offered him her hand he bent and raised it to his lips, and laid it on Sir James’ hand, and turned as if to go.

“Stay!” cried the knight; and——

“Go not, Master Askew!” said Alison. He hesitated for a moment, and there was a great perplexity in his eyes. She went to him and laid her hand upon his arm. “To please me, Master Askew,” she said sweetly; and he stayed. “I thank you, Master Askew”——began Alison.

“Nay, I am thanked enough by your acceptance of my gift,” he said. “You found the Hall, I see,”——he turned to Sir James.

“Ay, and my lady waiting for me at the gate!”

“James!” cried Alison, and blushed, so that Thomas Askew deemed that he had never seen her look so beautiful.

“Sweetheart! I have to thank Master Askew for finding you. Last night I had missed the road on the moor, and came near riding into the sea, and should have done so if Askew had not chanced by and called to me, and then, because it

waxed late, he sheltered me for the night, knowing all the while who 'twas that claimed his hospitality, and only telling me his story when the dawn had broken."

Askew had risen and gone to the window. "I pray you cease, Sir James," he said, turning suddenly to them, "if a man truly love a woman he be ready to serve her, for it be his highest privilege and his greatest pleasure to do her will. I pray you, therefore, not to pity me—there be no need. A man be no man who cannot sometimes forget himself."

Alison looked at him through a mist of tears. "That which a man could do, you have done, Master Askew ; for that I thank you. For what you be, God reward you—none other can."

He came quickly and took both her hands in his, but she drew him down to her gently and kissed his brow reverently.

"Farewell, dear friend!" she said. "I would not pain you now by keeping you. In the years to come, when you have in part forgot the pain, you will come to us again?"

He looked her unflinchingly in the eyes. "I will come again, Lady Alison, if I may, but I shall never forget."

He was gone in a moment, and they turned back to the seat by the fire. Somehow something of their perfect joy had fled, but it had left a more delicate happiness that was born of their sympathy

for the suffering of a good man. The hand of Derfel lay on the table. Sir James took it up.

"I will give it to Master Askew," he said, "in memory of this day."

She shivered a little. "'Tis an odd token," she said wonderingly.

"Nay, I know not, but I verily believe that there be a fate in it, Lady Alison. For long I have carried the hand with me, and would not part with it, even to Stafford, yet now it is borne in on me that it must be given to Master Askew, I know not why, but there be a meaning in the wish."

She said no more, but when the night fell and he rode away, she noted that he carried the token with him.

"To-morrow!" he said as he turned from the door. The rain and the wind had ceased, and the stars shone down on them out of a clear sky.

"To-morrow!" she repeated, and waved her hand to him as he rode away over the moor.

\* \* \* \* \*

## CHAPTER XXXI

### FULFILMENT

MAY rested on England. Her touch had restored the greenness of the trees and of the grass ; it had called forth the frail sweet flowers from their winter banishment to deck hill and dale, wind-swept moor and bleak cliffs, and the mossy banks of merry laughing brooks. The old thorn-trees at Hawsker were laden with the white perfumed may-blossoms, and the light warm breezes carried their aromatic odours far and near along the road that led towards York and London.

Life had grown desolate for Master Askew since Sir James and Lady Blundell had ridden away to Scotland. They had gone happy in each other and in their belief in the future, and Askew had tried to be happy too in the happiness of the woman he loved. Alison's patrimony had passed into his hands, and he had recently transferred his belongings and himself to the Hall. Once or twice news had reached him from Sir James. Once by the hand of a seafaring man from Whit-



by, who brought him news of their safe arrival in Antwerp, and he had astonished the man with the munificence of his gift. Other tidings had drifted in a kind of irresponsible manner to him, seemingly by accident, and he had thanked God for Alison's happiness, and that he had escaped the temptation that, yielded to, would never have brought him happiness.

Sir James had presented him with the hand of Derfel on the eve of his marriage, and he had accepted the gift with a sort of instinct that it was part of his fate, that at some time he would be called upon to yield it up to someone. It was a mysterious charge for which he expected some day to be called to account, and he never stirred far from home without carrying the token with him. And so it chanced that when his business called him to the capital, he bore the severed hand, as Sir James had done, at his saddle-bow. It was two years since he had visited London, and he looked to find many changes there; but he rode leisurely, for the freshness of the spring invited dalliance, if only that he might pause to inhale the perfume of the violets that called to him from every hedgerow, or to watch the gambols of the white-fleeced lambs at their mothers' sides, or to hearken to the full-throated thrushes' songs that thrilled with the ecstasy of life renewed. It was good to be alive, and the earth was a beautiful place, even though he could

not have his heart's desire. He had thrust aside all discontent in a sweet humbleness of mind that bid him rejoice in Alison's joy, even though part of its price was his own suffering. And the pain had softened and sweetened his nature, while it had strengthened and hardened his loftiness of purpose and will.

Yet another link that held him to earth had snapped suddenly and painfully, when his pale fair sister Marjorie had smiled a sweet farewell to her sisters at the Abbey, and so, putting aside with her frail slender hands the curtain that hangs between life and the world beyond, had passed to the other sphere, leaving only the subtile perfume of her short young life behind her. After the first keen feeling of regret, he had been almost thankful that it was so, for every day the clouds gathered more darkly over England, and every day the muttering of the storm drew nearer. With the departure of his sister he had come to feel like an exile, who waits for the hour of his own journey home, and the feeling was heightened as he proceeded on his way.

The city of York lay before him in all the bravery of her antiquity, set in the glory of the early summer as in a frame, yet he could not help but remember that it was but a year since two brave men had died there in the cause of truth, and crossing himself devoutly he rode by the city, entering it not; but making for the forest path

that lay beyond it. Here he rode securely, knowing that the outlaws would respect the token that he bore. And so, without fear, he proceeded on his way with a stout heart. But his ride saddened him somewhat, for in every place through which he passed he came upon evil signs of evil times. Here he came across a pillaged church, there a silent priory stood up gauntly against the blue sky, a wordless protest against the sacrilege that had desecrated and despoiled it, and all the way of the long road men came creeping stealthily to him from the cover of the woods to implore an alms. The sight sickened him, though he gave them all he had, even his provision for his journey, and then, when he had nothing left, he rode on hastily, for he had no heart to tell them that he had come to an end of his resources.

It was late on a Tuesday evening when he rode into London. The sun had already set in the fiery west, and the glow of it rested on the city like a mist of blood. He shuddered as he looked at it, for it seemed to him that the spires of St. Paul's and the surrounding churches lifted up the dread crimson stains, as if they would flaunt them in the very face of Heaven, and call down vengeance upon the people and the city. He tried to shake off the phantasy, but look where he would the illusion met him on every side, and he rode forward to Cheapside, and to the Green Dragon, in a vain attempt to escape from the horror.

The inn was full, and he had to be content with a bed in a small room where there were already two other travellers installed, and he bore with him to his chamber the hand of Derfel. In the long twilight the two men sat in low and earnest conversation by the window. He threw himself upon his bed ; his soul was wrung with the pity and the horror of his journey through the pleasant country ; and, to add to his torment, a vague fear of some dread happening was upon him. He strove to put it aside—to sleep. From time to time the men looked towards him, and lowered their voices. Their whisperings irritated him—he was no traitor that they should fear him. Now and then a word came to him—“Smithfield”—“Burning”—“Father Forrest.” He lay still and feigned to sleep. Father Forrest had been a friend of Alison’s in other days—he had been condemned long since, yet somehow the execution of the sentence had always been deferred. Had he come to London for this—that he might witness his death ?

He shook with the horror of the thought, and sat up suddenly. “Ha! what said you?” he cried, feigning to dream.

The two men looked at each other. “Nay, we said naught,” cried one.

“I dreamed then—yet I seemed to hear that one cried ‘Burn,’ and another ‘Forrest,’ and still another cried ‘Smithfield!’”

“Nay, there you dreamed not, sir,” said the

second traveller. "'Tis true that there be a burning at Smithfield in the morning—and the sufferer be a friar named Forrest, so please your worship."

"Alas! alas!" cried Askew, "yon friar was a most excellent man, a friend to one I know well, who esteemed him a holy man."

The travellers exchanged looks. "You be a stranger in London, sir. Pray you be wary, for your own sake; such words have lost men their heads ere now."

Askew rose and came to the window. "You be on which side?" he asked.

They answered him not, but made room for him, and he fell upon his knees between them, bearing the hand of Derfel in his hands. "Nay, I will tell you," he said, speaking low. "I seem to know your faces, though I never saw you before. You be of Greenwich."

They looked at him amazed.

"Nay," he said, "be not afraid, Reverend Fathers. I would go with you in the morning. Something—I know not what—bids me to the sorry spectacle."

"Sorry spectacle! Ay, in the eyes of men, but to the Angels the triumphal entry of a martyr into heaven," said the first speaker.

He raised his clasped hands, and looked upward as he spoke, and Askew saw that they trembled with the weakness of age, despite the fire that

flashed from his eyes. But he answered them not ; only when the night became dark, he told them the story of Derfel Gadarn, and showed them the hand of the Champion that he carried with him, and they marvelled much, wondering at the strange tale, and looking on the dark stain of Megan's blood, while he told them of the prophecy.

"'Twill be fulfilled—and speedily," said the elder of the companions, "yet I know not how. Prophecies be strange things, and come to pass when least expected."

"This one seems to be impossible of fulfilment," said Askew, and they spoke no more, but after a little while they turned towards the Cathedral, and so kneeled in prayer for the condemned Friar, until they were aweary and lay them down to sleep.

The tolling of the bell in the early dawn called them forth to Mass at St. Paul's. Askew knelt in a dark corner, striving with the horror that would scarce suffer him to pray. He was conscious of the revolt of his whole being against this gospel of suffering and strife ; and the Mass was over, and still the conflict raged within him. He followed his companions of the night when they left the church, and together they set forth. Already the streets were thronged with people of all degrees. Soldiers stood idly along the line that the procession would take later ; men with sober faces jostled with mummers and mountebanks ; women

even were there, richly clad heavily veiled women, and pert serving-maids. Some horsemen approached in double rank, and the soldiers stiffened and came to attention until the escort had gone by, then they resumed their indifferent attitudes, and talked and jested amongst themselves, and with such of the passers-by who heeded them.

Askew carried the hand of Derfel under his cloak, and kept close beside his companions. After a while they reached the open space before the church of St. Bartholomew. In every window, on the roofs of the neighbouring houses, massed in the fields around, were hundreds of people, intent on seeing what was passing in the open space that the soldiers kept. The guard was stricter here, for already several members of the Privy Council had taken their seats on the high scaffold that had been erected opposite the stake. The sun shone down on the glittering weapons and the jewelled attire of the councillors, and Askew shuddered at the contrast of their magnificence with the naked implements of death. He looked at the gallows, and beyond it he could see the Duke of Norfolk slowly ascending the steps of the scaffold, and pausing to speak with the Earls of Sussex and Hertford before proceeding to the seat reserved for him. Askew became conscious of a demon of fury and resentment tearing at his heart, and of a passion of impotent rebellion against the injustice of men.

The Lord Mayor arrived ere long in all the magnificence of crimson and gold, with his chain of office about his neck, and his plumed hat in his hand as he saluted the assembly. The people had been pressing into the open space since early morning, and Askew and his companions succeeded with some difficulty in stationing themselves within view of the stake, and with the token still held tightly under his cloak, he endeavoured to school himself to bear the horror of the coming tragedy. The mob was pressed tightly together, and the soldiers had considerable difficulty in keeping a way clear for the prisoner. The bell began to toll, and there was a cry that the procession was coming, and a rush of the crowd, that gave them an opportunity of slipping a little nearer to the fatal post and the pulpit, which had been erected for the occasion opposite to it. The sight of the great pile of faggots and straw, with the gallows above it, and the dangling chains, sickened Askew. He grew pale and shuddered, and clutched tightly the hand of Derfel. The contact reminded him of the prophecy, and his eyes were drawn to the pile of faggots. There were fragments of sacred images among them, and above them all—as if to crown the whole—was a gigantic head of a warrior with his visor up, and a hand that held a sword protruded from another portion of the heap. A thrill ran through him as he remembered the prophecy, and he wondered if



the fragments on the pile were those of the great statue of St. Derfel, but a hoarse roar that rose steadily in volume attracted his attention, and his eyes and those of all there were turned to the narrow lane between the lines of soldiers. For a space the crowd held their breath, but it was only the Bishop of London who arrived, and took his seat beside the Lord Mayor. The arrival of Latimer, Bishop of Worcester, was followed by a brief silence. Then the roaring of ten thousand voices heralded the prisoner's approach. Askew pressed forward, and caught a glimpse of the venerable old man as he passed the place where they stood. He was looking expectantly in that direction, and as one of his companions raised his hand above the heads of the spectators for a moment, the Friar bowed his head.

He had passed. Askew watched him ascend the steps of the scaffold, where he stood in full view of the assembled multitude. A swift pressure forward of the mob brought him, without personal effort of his own, in front of the scaffold, where he faced the venerable prisoner. A few moments passed in earnest conversation between Forrest and the Bishops, who evidently sought to dissuade him.

The Bishop of London turned from him hastily. "Preach to him, my Lord of Worcester," he said.

Latimer ascended the pulpit. There was a moment's pause. A silence had fallen upon the

assembled thousands, like the hush of expectation that precedes a storm. From where he stood Askew could see the old man's face, and his lips moving gently in prayer, and he marvelled at his serenity despite the feebleness of his frame. Once or twice he answered the preacher, but he could barely hear his words, though he could see that Latimer was plainly confounded at his answer, for he cried in a loud voice : " Burn him ! burn him ! for his words prove him guilty of death."

The serenity of his face altered not, and Latimer spoke again : " In what state diest thou, Friar ?"

Father Forrest came forward to the rail of the scaffold. " Hear me, good people !" he said in a loud voice, so that everyone in the vast crowd heard his words. " I am come hither to die for that I will not renounce my belief in the authority of our lord the Pope. And I say to you, that were an Angel from heaven to come and teach me any other doctrine than this which I have received from my youth, I would not believe him. And if my body should be cut joint by joint, or member after member, hanged, burned, or what pain soever might be done to my body, I would never turn from my old profession. And for you, Latimer," he added, " seven years past you dared not have made such a sermon for your life."

There was a little movement amongst the people, and the Council consulted amongst themselves, fearing a disturbance, for it was evident

that the prisoner had the sympathy of a great part of the mob.

A deep sob came from them, as they saw the venerable old man taken from the scaffold and hurried to the stake. The meaning of the clanking chains that hung above the pile was now apparent, for they passed them about the body of their victim and suspended him over it.

Once more he cried out with a loud voice :  
“ O Lord God, neither fire nor gallows nor any torments whatsoever shall separate me from Thee.”

Askew would fain have hidden his face for dread of the spectacle, but his eyes were riveted on the form of the Friar, as he swayed in the embrace of the clanking chains. The wind had sprung up, and they swung to and fro with a hideous creaking sound. The silence was profound—intense—with expectation and fear. The horror tore at Askew's heart, till he could have shrieked aloud, and he turned his face away, that he might not see. The crackling of burning wood came to him with a sound of fury like the raging of demons, and he crossed himself fearfully. At that moment the hand of Derfel was torn from his grasp in the eager press of the crowd, and it fell within the barrier. A bystander kicked it savagely, and it rolled near the pile of faggots that was laid ready for the men to replenish the fire. One of them took it carelessly, and flung it into the

blaze with an oath. The memory of the prophecy returned to Askew, and he knew that the image of Derfel Gadarn was fulfilling its mission, even as it had been foretold long years ago.

A great awe stole over him, a sense of a supernatural presence ; he almost forgot the horror of the scene in the realization that this was the brave combat of a Christian soul, that even now stood on the very threshold of heaven. Forrest's voice came to him once again ; the flames were blown away from him, prolonging his agony.

"In the shadow of Thy wings will I hope until iniquity pass away !" he cried, and Askew sent up an intense wordless petition, that merciful death might come swiftly to the old man. There was a moment's pause, and then a little crush of the people, then silence again, as with a crash the gallows fell bodily into the fire underneath, a little crackling of the heavy timbers, and then silence, the silence of death !

Derfel Gadarn had redeemed his promise ; he had been with the Friar in the day of his battle, and in the fire the prophecy was fulfilled, the victory won, the suffering past ; there remained only the acclamation of the ages and the Crown of Life !

Askew raised his head. A great rage of despair was upon him, as he thought of the floods of evil that had been loosed over the land. Then, as he stood quivering with the passion of his hate,

it fell from him suddenly as an outworn garment, and his soul was filled with peace unutterable. It was as if the hand of Derfel had been laid upon him in some strange efficacious benediction, and he stole away to the Cathedral, where he rested in a dim distant shadow and tried to readjust his judgments of men and things—of this world and the next. He counted up his misfortunes, his sorrows, the failure of his dreams, the horrors of the morning holocaust. He counted the cost and the reward. It was scarcely a conscious thought—certainly he would not have called it prayer—yet when it seemed to him that the hand of Derfel Gadarn beckoned him also to the fray, he rose and followed where it seemed to lead.



## EPILOGUE

### I.

THE great square of Antwerp lay wrapt in the light of the June sunset. It gleamed like live rubies in the casements of the tall old houses, and rested on the great spire of the Cathedral that stretched away upward into the liquid gold of the evening sky. Then deep blue shadows stole gnome-like from narrow side-streets, and crept across the square until the rosy light was turned to amethyst, and twilight fell like the blessing of Heaven on a full day.

In a great shadowed room of one of the houses a lady sat lost in thought in the depths of a deep carved arm-chair. By her side stood a young man in the dress of a student.

"You may bring him in to see me, Thomas," she said slowly, after a long pause. "Yet I cannot fancy that I know him, my son. It is so many years since we left England, and I had so few friends."

The youth did not answer her, but he went to the door. "Come in, Father!" he said, and a

tall, broad-shouldered man entered the room and came swiftly forward. Something in the carriage of the head and the swift action arrested the attention of the lady ; she thought that she remembered the way he took her hand, but the face was a puzzle to her, for it was the face of a man well past his prime, and with white hair that curled about his temples.

"Lady Blundell!" he cried, as he raised her hand for a moment to his lips. And then a great revelation came to her so that she was nearly afraid.

"Father!" she said, and was thankful for the twilight that hid her momentary confusion, "pray you be seated ; this is a great surprise. It is so long since we heard of you that we were afraid you had met with some misfortune, but how——" She paused, not certain how to proceed.

He laughed a little at her bewilderment. "It was like this, Lady Blundell! You remember the hand of Derfel?"

"Ay, ay," she said quickly, and held her breath to listen.

"It chanced that I had to go to London on business of my own, and, as it was my custom, I bore the hand with me. I arrived on the eve of Father Forrest's death, and went to the burning in the company of two Greenwich friars. They were disguised, for the King was angered against the whole community." And so he told her of the

burning, and of the fragments of the great statue amidst the faggots, and how, too, the great hand of St. Derfel was thrown on the pile and the prophecy fulfilled, and thus of the death and triumph of the blessed Friar. "And," said he, "the horror of it ate into my soul. I cannot tell you what or how I felt. It seemed like an eternity of torture until the end came."

She shuddered. "I knew him well at Greenwich," she said.

"Ay, I knew that. I rode back to the North more quickly than I had come, and very sad at heart for the loss of a good man. In a little while the light came to me, and I settled my affairs and sailed from the bay in a little fishing-boat, not caring to pass again through London. And that is all; I am from Douay now, and go on the English mission to-morrow." He said it very quietly.

She bent her head. "I understand. My son!" she faltered, indicating the youth at her side.

He smiled at her. "Nothing will be save that which God permits," he said, and, rose for Sir James Blundell had just come in.

"Why, how's this, Alison? All in darkness?"

She went to him, and laid her hand upon his arm.

"We have a visitor, James," she said, and led him forward.

"Nay, come here that I may see your face!" he



cried, and the priest went to him, facing the twilight that shone in through the window.

"Thomas Askew! as I live!" cried Sir James. "Forgive my want of ceremony, Father," he added, touching the priest's habit, "I knew not of this."

Father Askew laughed. "I have not many friends in England to surprise, so the better for the success of my mission it may be. And now farewell, for the hour grows late, and I may not tarry."

Alison came to him where he stood. "Your blessing, old friend," she said, and they knelt about him.

"God bless you, my friends, and bring us all to peace at the last," he said. A great sob came to Alison's lips, but ere she had time to speak again the priest was gone.

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## II.

An old man plodded wearily along the mountain path. It was hard walking for one so feeble, and now and then he paused to rest.

"Llanderfel," he murmured to himself, "I must reach Llanderfel," and he put forth a new endeavour. It grew late, and still he wandered in the woods. Somehow he could not find the way that he used to know so well. He came to a heap

of stones at last, and sat down wearily, for he could go no farther. After a while he fell asleep, his head resting upon the stones, his feet lying upon the soft moss that lay thickly around. Above him the trees waved gently in the soft breeze, and a perfume of wild thyme came to him, and the music of a little brook that rustled over dark yellow sands. He was conscious of these things in his dreams, and woke suddenly with the sense of a presence near him. A great fear stole over him, and he knelt by the stones and prayed. Memory came so clearly to him that it seemed a vision—he could see a crowd of armed men, and an old Welsh woman who prophesied, and her son; someone had said that he was dumb. Whose hand had stricken them down before the shrine?

“It was not mine!” he exclaimed, and shivered as though one had accused him. Then with a sudden access of fear, he flung himself down upon the ground and prayed again; but this time he rose not, for he was too feeble, and the hand of death was upon him. The early dawn came, and looked at him pityingly, and wept over him.

“A priest!” he cried; “O God! for a priest to shrive me before I go hence.”

A traveller on the road heard the voice, a tall, broad-shouldered man in black attire. For a moment he stopped to listen, then he turned aside to look for the speaker. After a little search he

put aside a huge bramble and came upon the old man as he lay, and he was nigh unto death.

"Shrive me, shrive me, Father!" he cried piteously, as he opened his eyes. "Nay, sir, I thought it was a priest," he said, with a great shadow of disappointment on his face.

"And so I am, by God's grace."

The old man looked at him wonderingly. "There be hope for such as I?" and there was a question in his voice.

"Ay, for you and for all of us," answered the priest.

An hour later Father Askew closed the old man's eyes, and blessed his lonely grave, for he might not tarry, and with a prayer for the departed soul he turned away with a deep thanksgiving that he had been privileged to smooth the returning path of God's prodigal—Ellis Price.

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